***Viewing Composition through New Media:***

***The Interpenetration of Visuality, New Literacy, and Composition***

***With Attention to Facebook***

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**Abstract**

*“In the electric age we wear all mankind as our skin”—Marshall McLuhan*

New Media have altered the way in which people socialize through a remaking of what is possible in communication. As a direct result, those areas of educational institutions which attend to any discourse as an object of study face an unbending pressure to adapt. The common disparity between the modes of composition taught in the classroom and the modes of composition that drive students’ lives suggest that the deadline for changes has already passed; however, the staying power of institutionalized modes is not a new discovery, and steps are being taken to incorporate contemporary modes of composition—and the media through which they are expressed—into a new electric composition classroom.

Flourishing social media platforms—such as Facebook—have added strong dialogic and collaborative components to the transcendent perceptual-visual capabilities of the world-wide digital network. These components are also evident in other digital technologies such as wikis and electronic mail. These digital social media have permeated our society at all levels, filling the cracks and spaces within, without, and between the institutional and the non-institutional, the local and the global. As these forces strain to maintain specificity from the encroaching fringes of the other, the extent of dialogism allowed by the digital meaning-making spaces we populate become diluted, failing to approach a synergy which would allow for the optimization of the critical interpretation and production of meaning. Composition educators share a burden of responsibility for

Caught in the flux between establishment and training and innovation and adaptation, composition instructors often encounter difficulty in the appropriation of digital discourses for the writing classroom. In search of the means to address the increasing pressures of discursive evolution, I will traverse the space between theory and application to uncover the proverbial missing links between composition pedagogy and changing forms of visual and digital literacy. I hope to reveal an accessible perspective informed in the new mode of instructional literacy required of composition instructors: fluency in conversing with countless modes of meaning-making, a veritable diorama of multi-media, and the learning connections of students.

Working toward an integrated composition curriculum—inclusive observe the complex landscape of digital and visual I will apply several critical lenses from across several disciplines and mediums will inform the theoretical foundation I hope to construct observe the surrounding landscape of visual and digital literacies and their connections to our writing classrooms. The perspectives established in this process will serve as viewing lenses as I explore Facebook and other digital social media platforms with the intention of explicating and optimizing pedagogical tools for composition classrooms.

**Dialogism and Composition in the New Media Age**

Composition studies, as the term is often used in academia, refer to the study of only one type of composition: written discourse. Though this narrow scope of attention is in decline, those who still ascribe to the academic primacy of the written word unintentionally oppress important aspects of the realm of composition. Composition across multiple mediums—visual, digital, as well as written—parallels the increasingly hybridized social and cultural lives of students in the outside world; offering new learning experiences to strengthen critical thinking and writing skills. If composition instruction in the 21st century is to keep pace with the fast-paced and ever-evolving discursive forms

A one-dimensional approach to the relational process of composition denies students the opportunity to learn about composition as a dialogic activity that engages with every aspect of their lives. All acts of composing are activities of relationship: composer to information, information to receiver, receiver to composer, and each element is connected to the discursive infrastructures that penetrate all culture and thought. The field of composition studies, and ultimately the composition classroom, would benefit from embracing the study of the process by which human reality is dialogically composed. Such an analysis would serve to foster the critical thinking abilities of students, instructing them in the art of interacting with all aspects of their reality as producers, consumers, and critics. This type of full-fledged engagement will aid students in their journeys across the bridges that connect the seemingly disparate venues of their lives—often spread across various digital planes in addition to the material..

I believe it is critical that educators accept the dialogic relationship the composition classroom shares with discursive arenas outside of the linguistic and the textual. Digital media serves this purpose exceptionally, breeding new forms of compositions while providing unparalleled control of composition across the field of visuality.

The interpenetration of visuality, new media, and composition offers a rich space for the exploration of the process of creating meaning and exposing the paradigmatic frameworks that underlie the construction of meaning in all forms. The firm establishment, however, of the supremacy of text in composition classrooms, overshadows the possible benefits of studying visual and digital modes of composition. Of course, visuals are often used as peripheral adornments in composition classrooms and digital media forms have a presence—though largely utility-based.

This is simply not enough.

The dialogic nature of meaning-making and the dominance digitization and of visual rhetoric in mass media, demand that students develop a critical awareness of these forms and a fluency in creating within their spaces.

Bridging the gap between different types of literacy—visual, written, and digital in this case—serves the venture of student writing by unleashing tools in the composition classroom that are typically relegated to extracurricular realms like advertisement and entertainment. The discursive authority of these visual mediums in the everyday lives of students warrants greater attention from composition and rhetoric studies.

Many of these students—while engaging daily with extracurricular dialogic composition-through new media—have been steeped in composition curricula that emphasize linear models of composition, neglecting key dialectic elements of the process. These learning models, including theories like process and post-process instruction, appear two-dimensional to students accustomed to composing in the multi-dimensional depths of new media. Sondra Perl, in “The Composing Processes of Unskilled College Writers” writes that these “[n]arrative descriptions of composing processes do not provide sufficiently graphic evidence for the perception of underlying regularities and patterns” (18). This failure to provide writing instruction of a “probing nature” (Perl 18) intended to “elucidate basic [composition] processes” (Perl 18) leaves a knowledge gap between student understanding and student composition. The result is a state of poor education economy. Students struggling with issues of traditional written literacy arrive in the classroom brimming with the potential to expand the raw components of a complex and sophisticated paradigm for interpreting. When paired in the composition classroom, writing and the manipulation of the various media of modern visual culture create a learning model with broad scope and an economical sensibility which breeds literacy tools from all available sources: traditional curriculum, student experience, popular culture, technology, art, and so on.

In this paper I will explore avenues for opening the composition classroom to a dialogic experience that includes discursive arenas outside the traditional academic forms—specifically the field of visuality as it becomes manifest through digital media. The interpenetration of visuality and composition offers a rich space for the exploration of the process of creating meaning and exposing the paradigmatic frameworks that underlie the construction of meaning in all forms.

The firm establishment of the supremacy of text in composition classrooms overshadows some of the potential benefits of studying visuals. Of course, visuals are often used in peripheral ways in composition classrooms, but the dialogic nature of meaning-making and the dominance of visual rhetoric in mass digital media, demand that students develop a critical awareness of this form and a fluency in creating within its spaces.

Each of these spaces of literacy is a locale amidst a collection of intersecting planes contained by a singular discursive space. Composition occurs in these locales. Traditional composition pedagogy has treated these locales as pockets—labeled disciplines or genres visualizing each pocket as, to some degree, self-contained. But no boundaries mark the surface of any discursive plane nor does any plane fail to intersect with every other plane. Composing consists of movement across and between these planes. The illusion of pockets or boundaries marking these discursive planes is the result of the movement necessary to progressively create meaning in such a space.

The type of engaged composition that the twenty-first century classroom must foster is akin to trailblazing in these discursive spaces—finding new paths to connect meaning-making locales, producing novel combinations of discursive elements and fresh meaning to join the and mediums and through a range of processes. The development of critical analysis is essential to understanding composition and the multitude of dialogic environments in which texts are composed. While in academia the term ‘composition’ is tied to studies in writing, its use here refers to all forms of meaning-making, with an emphasis on visual and digital forms and processes. By using the term in this way I seek to abolish “the distance between the visual and the verbal forms of information practiced in verbal-based classrooms” revealed to be “highly artificial” (Childers 3); or, perhaps more accurately, to highlight theories and practices that demonstrate that this distance never existed.

The various modes of written composition share dialogic space with composition in film, graphic art, drama, music, architecture, and even mathematics and music. Each mode entwined with the other, occupying mutual semantic space even as they express their distinct characteristics in a dialogic exchange that transforms each, simultaneously expanding their mutuality while altering the constitution of their parts. With the advent of visually oriented digital platforms for social composition the cross-pollenation of media has proliferated, birthing new forms of literacy to which composition classrooms are scrambling to adapt.

As a cog in a greater dialogic system, the relationship between written and visual disciplines is one of action and impact. The study of visual media in the composition class inevitably impacts student learning of the traditional composition genres explored in the curriculum. The benefits of this cross-germination are twofold.

Even as introducing new media affects the learning context of the classroom, the learning context, novel to these visual media, affects the way they are perceived and interpreted by students. The emphasis on critical thought and process in composition studies is the disciplinary tool that promotes student awareness of the composition of the visual world outside the classroom through the glomming together of disciplines and media in a study of visual culture. This cross-disciplinary study opens a space for critical literacy which allows students to analyze all facets of their world, better informing individual decisions and the overall composition of individual identity. In the end this study enables students to turn their critical awareness into critical composition.

Critical awareness does not develop merely from viewing visual culture through the disciplinary lens of composition studies, nor does it reach full potential through safe, prescribed engagement with these visual texts. As stated previously, action is the essential prerequisite to the desired impact of this cross-disciplinary study: bold, even aggressive action that lays bare the components of media, allowing for reinterpretation through student creative production. Empowered textual production opens students’ eyes to their space within the discursive system and their ability to take ownership of that space—an integral part of the dialogic sphere. Knowledge of place allows a discursive participant to fashion their own impact on the trajectory of the discourses that together weave the web of human culture.

Peggy Albers and Jerome C. Harse in their article addressing new literacy and multimodality express a desire to “redefine[e] the world of literacy and basic notions of what it means to be literate” (6) in a culture submersed in new media. The pair explain that today’s educators “must be prepared to work with how messages are sent, received, and interpreted, as well as how media and technology position us as viewers and users of multimedia texts in the world” (Albers and Harste 6).

Though their position is largely harmonious with that of my own, I would revise this last statement to include the role of *producer* of multimedia texts. Albers and Harste’s omission of this critical role within discourse is quizzical when we consider it is drawn from an article on writing pedagogy: a pedagogical vein which, if it is to be successful, must empower its students as producers of discourse. Dialogically, it is a given that every individual is involved at all levels of the meaning-making process—including producer—though their awareness of their power to create and their ability to skillfully manipulate discourse for the benefit of their textual production. Each student brings a unique collection of meaning to this productive process, traversing discursive spaces and contact zones, encountering new messages that impact the constitution of their collective meaning: or their identity.

As the educational system’s endeavor to develop informed and critical individual thinkers is harried by the proliferation of forms of literacy, a type of *holistic* learning process which transcends traditional boundaries (generic, disciplinary, and physical) becomes neccessary.

Mind I do not lightly employ the term *necessary.*

For whatever litany of reasons the necessity for an expanded composition curriculum does not build sufficient pressure behind the swelling gravity of visual culture studies to penetrate composition classrooms as deeply as is *necessary*. Many pedagogists do not recognize visual culture as valuable to the writing discipline. Because of the stubborn nature of this dispute, which boils down to an argument over the inherent *value* of the media in question, a discussion of visual culture’s merit alone will not serve the purpose of expanding the media repertoire of *all* composition curricula.

In this case merit must go beyond the demonstration of necessity in order to revolutionize. In fact, a strictly academic account of the multitude of proof—social, technological, encomic, and other factors—would be gratuitous. One needs not even turn around to witness a dozen demonstrations of vast changes in our cultural discourse: vast changes that demand adaptations in both stance and content in educational contexts.

In my study, Facebook will serve as a key medium for instructional models, projects in multi-modal composition, classroom community-building strategies, and the application of critical, pedagogical, and writing theory. Facebook represents a valuable avenue for the study of dialogic sphere as it exists today, ruled by the individual perspective and the digital image. This social media platform serves as the infrastructure for my plea for composition pedagogy to acknowledge the often academically unwelcome forms of literacy born of new media. It is necessity that will prove the deciding factor in the tension between progressive forces and conservative tendencies in the field of composition.

In order to demonstrate the value and the necessity of visual media in the classroom, I will present research in theories of art, film, photography, writing, linguistics, pedagogy, and literature that supports the case for visual culture in the composition classroom. In presenting this case I will highlight certain theories—such as those of Jaques Derrida and M.M. Bakhtin—that offer not just evidence of value and immediacy in the call for hybridized study but also offer tools that enable such study to meet the lofty goal of taking bold action to empower student awareness and composition.

***Facebook and the Dialogic Sphere***

The interactions of connected units of meaning give life to the discourses that orbit the dialogic sphere, the incredible impact of the internet, more specifically social media platforms, is due to these same interactions of units of meaning connected by means of a network. The internet did not alter the fashion in which meaning is created, but rather, it offered a powerful new avenue of connection that allowed formerly disparate units of meaning to come into contact, birthing meanings that would not have otherwise been possible. Throughout human history media have progressively lifted the chains that bind the course of dialogic discourse. Spoken forms, the written word, the printing press, the telephone—each evolution in media proliferates the forms of the old media and sparks new forms from the new meaning-making relationships formed by the breaking down of discursive barriers.

Interaction and engagement, the dialectic and the collaborative: the cornerstones of the composition pedagogy that I support as a means of addressing the demand for new literacies are also integral part of the digital infrastructure that allows social media platforms like Facebook to flourish. The highly immersive social quality of Facebook—a 2010 study by the Nielson Company revealed the average Facebook user spent more than 7 hours a month on that site as compared to 1 hour on Youtube and less than 2 hours on Google (blog.nielsen.com)—hints at the program’s successful implementation of these cornerstones and its global impact on its users. The dialogic sphere can be viewed—through the educational tool of metaphor— as a macrocosmic globe of influence that parallels the unique digital sphere of influence created by Facebook. The perspective highlighted by this metaphor can serve as a useful pedagogical tool to introduce composition students to the dialogic aspects of composing.

Metaphor is certainly an apt device to address the commonly held perspective of the sphere that composition and rhetoric studies inhabit. Bronwyn T. Williams, in “Seeking New Worlds: The Study of Writing beyond Our Classrooms” employs a similar metaphor:

In our own way we began as a set of disconnected programs and practices […] which eventually bumped into one another and created networks and conversations about teaching writing. When the *growth* of such programs and the conversations reached a critical mass, our field emerged as a recognizable entity […] since then, first-year writing, as the largest program, grew and stabilized as the center of the solar system while other concerns and locations about writing on college campuses resulted in the formation of new bodies, such as Writing Across the Curriculum and writing centers and digital writing. These programs and subfields of varying sizes grew and stabilized, all orbiting within the solar system of college composition (128).

Having accepted a dialogic approach to meaning-making, I find, in Williams’ metaphor, the logical indictment of a flawed system. The fallacious notion of these sub-fields emerging through random collisions and amalgamations of process does not adhere to the dialogic, phenomenological reality of the interconnectedness of the material means of all forms of communication and, subsequently, the interconnectedness of all discourse. The solar system model is too linear to provide a helpful perspective on the current place and progression of composition studies: except perhaps in base relief.

This introduction of the following Facebook facilitated project serves students as a paradigm for the theory of the dialogic sphere as well as a practical demonstration of these pedagogical cornerstones: interaction, engagement, dialectalism, and collaboration. Applied to digital media, these cornerstones allow what Doering, Beach, and O’brien envision as “moving beyond using the web to simply access information” (41) to using digital tools “to be active communicators” (41) on what Richardson refers to as the “Read/Write Web” (3). The empowerment of the individual in means of production in this way, converting information consumers to information producers through the facilitation of new literacies, enables the preexisting conduits of the dialogic process to come to light in a profound way. The following classroom focus will emphasize the spherical aspect of dialogism by decentralizing the classroom conversation. Instructor and student participate as readers, writers, photographers, videographers, and critics through a Facebook network geared toward creating an engaged electric classroom.

Intended as a beginning focus in a composition curriculum aimed at promoting multimodal composition, this project sparks an engaged, interactive, dialectic, and collaborative classroom community. Students’ familiarity with Facebook makes this an excellent starting point as most are equipped with at least a basic literacy in navigating this social platform; however, this basic literacy often touches only the surface of the capabilities of Facebook, hardly revealing the whole of digital dialogic sphere which it inhabits.

Classroom Focus: Facebook Networking Project (FBN)

It is important for the composition instructor to take part in this dialogic endeavor, both as a demonstration of the proper implementation of the tenants of dialogism through social media and as a means of engagement with the digital classroom community that embodies the cornerstones of this project. With this in mind the composition instructor should create a Facebook page that focuses on class activities and links to related material. Ideally, the instructor should aim to add other composition instructors as administrators to the page, promoting the sharing of ideas across classrooms and broadening the online community. Throughout the process the instructor should remain engaged with her own page as well as the various pages created and maintained by the class. The News Feed function on Facebook acts as an internal RSS feed based on other Facebook pages selected by the page owner or administrator, allowing a decentralized form of disseminating information as each user receives information posts on their own page.

Students will engage with the instructor’s Facebook page as part of the deliberately dialectic progression of the class: designed to unfold across multiple planes of meaning-making accessible from a variety of view points and through a number of tools. From the beginning students will engage with the class through the kaeladescopic design of the curriculum: in the case of the traditional college classroom, the community of personal presence provides a valuable context for production and analysis. This community cannot be replaced by online digital communities; these phenomenological interactions are capable of certain potentialities void in a digital environment. In similar fashion, digital environments offer possibilities for engagement that are not possible in the traditional classroom. The approach of this project does not value one context over the other, but acknowledges both the interconnectedness and uniqueness of all these forms of discursive experience.

As students build group and individual pages on Facebook they will engage with a number of literacies targeted by 21st century composition reformists: including digital writing, video editing, photography, and web tool navigation. They will also gain access to a broad audience of Facebook users and a digital space for the construction of a classroom community. Diversity, as well as community, is one of the powerful tools offered by Facebook. The availability of multiple-media that can be linked to and used through Facebook—including Youtube, Twitter, Foursquare—illustrate the dialogic—or interconnected—machinations of composition. Exercises in this multi-media composition project will strengthen student understanding of dialogics and prepare them for later work in multi-genre projects.

**The Multimedia Phantasmagoria**

The current school-age generation has been raised in a multimedia phantasmagoria born of modern media technology. The authors of *Beyond Words: Reading and Writing in a Visual Age* focus their preface on an explanation of this phenomena and its impact on the composition classroom:

For many of us, awakening to the latest transformations in communication and technology can seem […] disorienting. Others just take it for granted that their telephones can send pictures or text messages. The reality is we’re often working at the edges of media and communication that are rooted in the past but also transforming knowledge in the present. We’re now connected to electronic pulses that blossom into words, sounds, and images and then morph into message that are simultaneously new and familiar. In this environment, the ways we read and write and what we consider to be “texts” inevitably shift and take on new meanings. (Anderson, et al. xi)

The authors go on to explain their attempts to address the “challenges raised by these transformations in communication and composition,” taking advantage of these teachable moments to help “both students and instructors to develop instincts for understanding media of all sorts (Anderson, et al. xi). I believe that these “instincts” for understanding various media are the end result of vigorous efforts to engage students with the paradigms that underlie familiar media forms. Once aware of these interconnected paradigms, students should be encouraged to explore the manifestations of these forms of literacy. Continued analysis and experimentation with the elements of these new literacies promotes the development of critical “instincts.”

Today, visual languages are fostered through countless hours of exposure to visual mediums: television, film, photography, advertisements, the internet, smart phone applications, and the countless new media and media hybrids emerging from the primordial digitization of the modern age. As this process—viewed as progress—unfolds, textual mediums continue to take a backseat to visual mediums in the everyday lives of young people, often functioning merely as caption and catch phrase to punctuate a visual message. This exposure, however, to visual forms of meaning-making does not create a critical or “instinctual” visual literacy in the viewer. Without engagement aimed at creating critical awareness, these visual forms do not lend themselves to critical awareness. The rhetorical design of many of these forms aims to create a type of awareness very different from the one sought by education in literacy. Often taking the form of advertisements or *viewing farms*—media applications created with the sole purpose of growing and solidifying a viewership and selling that viewership’s attention for profit. These visual modes are intended to carry a surface message of consumer impulse

Despite the need to equip students with the critical tools and understanding to engage with a highly visual culture, academia—to a large degree—relegates these media to the peripheries of the curriculum. Edmund Feldman addresses these issues of visual literacy in his article of that title, acknowledging that most people are “visually literate in the sense that they are capable of receiving and acting on the signals sent out to them by electronic and printed pictures” (195); however, he continues that these same people are not considered visually literate if we mean by the term “the ability to understand the rhetoric, the persuasive devices, employed in visual communication” (195). In other words, Feldman asserts that most individuals are capable of receiving the surface message of consumption relayed by a television commercial, but unable to understand the mechanisms that created in them the intended response.

While it is clear that most individuals are engaged in visual forms of discourse almost constantly, Feldman’s belief that a majority of them are not critically aware of the discursive forms involved in their composition equates to the calling in of an educational debt. This lack of critical literacy in the most prolific forms of meaning-making in our society prevents individuals from understanding the dialogic nature of their environment and becoming productive and literate composers of the forms that populate their world.

The curricular need to produce and understand complex meaning prompts the authors of *Teaching Writing Using Blogs, Wikis, and other Digital Tools* to offer an approach to composition instruction that embraces the complexities of contemporary discourse. The authors explain that it is “important that [students] learn how to think about the use and design of visual images” but not in and of themselves, but in a dialectal combination of “text and audio to engage in visual rhetoric” (Beach 163).

While these mediums represent a variety of disciplines the relational nature of meaning-making leads to the inevitable overlap of the discursive spaces these forms inhabit—like the blending colors of the Ven Diagram. This overlap in media leads to what some would call hybridization. Mary E. Hocks in “Understanding Visual Rhetoric in Digital Writing Environments” explores the implication of the hybridization of media and cultural forms, claiming that “[a]cknowledging this hybridity means that the relationship among word and image, verbal texts and visual texts, ‘visual culture’ and ‘print culture’ are all dialogic relationships rather than binary opposites” (631).

The blurring of boundaries cannot be achieved outside of dialogic space, therefore occurrences of such blending can be said to embody a dialogic interaction. The spaces this dialogic action transforms are the new shapes of color in the ven diagram, new colored-lenses through which to view an object of study in a different light. In a more material light, these spaces, born between mediums—or forms—often consist of media and digital technology that are largely misunderstood and underrepresented in academic curriculum. Many digital social media platforms—Facebook, Twitter, Youtube—are potential objects of study rich with opportunity. These digital media physically traverse disciplinary boundaries, instituting a dialogic exchange speeding across the globe and into millions of homes and schools on the digital-electric highway. This digital network has the potential to operate as a clear metaphor for the dialogic sphere: a paradigmatic visual with which students are both familiar and engaged. The illustration alone—speculation on classroom applications withstanding for the moment—provides a useful tool in strengthening understanding of the dialogic connections through which meaning is made.

Populating the composition classroom with critical tools and points of navigation provide students with a starting point, allows students to incorporate their familiar digital composition skills, and provides a truly dialogic environment through the provision of an online-audience. In the endeavor to narrow the knowledge gap between forms of visual and verbal composition these tools ease the transition of crossing of disciplinary boundaries. Altering one’s perspective on an idea, moving from concrete assumptions to plastic inquiries, and taking on the trial-and-revision process prerequisite to the mastery of a new literacy can be as vexing for some as it is exciting for others. The provision of reference points and forums for communication, for those wandering lost and those blazing ahead in new spaces of meaning-making, is an essential component to composition curricula that seek to educate students in a broad scope of literacy forms.

The utilization of technology often serves as an excellent classroom application for this reimagining of the composition curriculum. Digital tools blend the written and the visual almost intuitively through digitized platforms, offering one of the largest and most accessible hybridized environments for study in the classroom. The act of composition must occur in order for student engagement to reach the turning point in which critical understanding becomes a critical literacy capable of producing literate texts across media. In achieving this goal, the composition classroom does not need to be lassoed to traditional writing genres or even strictly to writing. Visual culture offers a number of forms in which students can produce texts useful to the goals of the composition classroom. In the shape of social media these visual forms find a

Many activist scholars have challenged the idea that the composition classroom should be restrained by the sole production of traditionally academic writing genres. As part of “The Five-Paragraph Essay and the Deficit Model of Education” the collaborative writers point out that research suggests “richer possibilities” for composition classrooms by “engaging [students] in writing genres that actually appear in the world outside of school” (Brannon et all 16). This is a step toward addressing the dialogic aspect of meaning-making; however, it fails to cross the boundary between written and other forms of composition. If these production boundaries are not traversed the perception and subsequent crossing of other boundaries—important to the development of critical literacy and composition—will suffer.

The UNC writing project appreciates the importance of engaging writers through “multiple genres” and through experiences in production that “writers gain affiliations, those relationships that mark one as [a] participant in various discourses” (Brannon 17). This engagement with various discourses is foundational to learning to compose in dialogic environments. Awareness of one’s place within these discourses is equally important.

The writers of the UNC project fail to address the role of the writer as not just a participant but a product, an expression, and a component of the dialogic medium. Marshall McLuhan, in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, describes the dialogism of media, explaining that “the ‘content’ of any medium is always another medium” (8). This statement illuminates the depth of the entanglement of discourses in dialogic meaning-making. Bahktin asserts the importance of dialogism to the very nature of meaning-making in *The Dialogic Imagination*: the “dialogic orientation of a word among other words […] creates new and significant artistic potential in discourse” (275). Based on an awareness of the producer’s role within discourse as a dialogic component—just like the media and the message—Bahktin’s statement can be understood to refer to new potential in media and meaning as well as new potential in individuals, and perhaps even new individuals.

A classroom that promotes an open dialogue of ideas invites students to listen to the debate and decide the place of each piece of rhetoric in the discursive body. In short, the classroom should become a zone of influence. This dialog constructs layers of knowledge that offer feedback on classroom applications and the unique perspectives offered by disciplines, genres, mediums, and fellow classmates. These viewing lenses serve to build the discourse through the exchange of viewpoints, bouncing idea off of idea in the dynamic zone of influence between the classroom and the rest of the world.

By viewing the classroom in a dialogic context students can be encouraged to seek out intersections in their daily lives. As students incorporate knowledge and forms of literacy from the disciplines of the extracurricular, their levels of investment in their research and composition should increase. As Kelly Gallagher expresses in *Teaching Adolescent Writing* when students are allowed to invest in their composition by making choices about its form, content, or medium a “chain reaction” begins which “creates student buy-in, which in turn generates writing motivation, which in turn causes students to write better” (91). The more continuity that a student encounters between their academic composition work and their every-day lives the more apparent the relevance of the composing becomes: the more they recognize the importance of the composition classroom’s zone of influence. Excluding prominent new modes of digital composition from the classroom decreases the legitimacy of the zone of influence and excludes valuable sources of dialogic meaning-making.

Gallagher’s interests reside in literacy. He cites a deficiency in how the American education system addresses “today’s literacy stampede (3).” His statements equate to an indictment of the educational institution’s failure to address the highly hybridized forms of literacy that are necessary to critically navigate the world in and out of the classroom. He explains that the material and purpose of composition arises from many different contexts, though my application of his comments to visual and to digital meaning-making forms is an extension on his work. As he describes the interaction of the various contexts for writing, he establishes the groundwork for a dialogic writing process, “[o]nce students recognize that first-draft writing is tentative and exploratory in nature, their trepidations begin to dissipate” (Gallagher 51). Gallagher aims to draw a parallel between conversational rhetoric and the early stages of composition, both fluid, low-anxiety forms of expression. He juxtaposes these forms with more stylized rhetorical forms like calligraphy or public oration. Often known as *frozen*, these stylized forms do not lend themselves to revision. Once students can recognize the difference between a finished publishable product and their early writing stages quality writing through revision should increase as anxiety decreases.

Many digital writing forms, such as wikis, allow for collaborative writing and revision that is reminiscent of the composition classroom peer revision process. New video editing and sharing technology allows for individual participation in the framing of shots and the arrangement of imagery. These digital tools can be utilized to further demonstrate to students the fluid and revisionist aspects of all discourse.

***Visual Revision Focus***

Countless film, photography, and art critics have written about the camera lens: the most powerful technological extension of man. Presented in the context of the composition classroom these theories on film provide one such framework for a creative endeavor geared to the elucidation of the revision process in writing.

The prominence of film in popular culture and the transparency of the medium’s revision process make film the natural selection for a media intensive study of revision. Once students acquire an awareness of the various editing mechanisms utilized by filmmakers to express their particular cinematic message; this awareness functions as a paradigm for revision. Again donning a pair of dialogic goggles, this filmic paradigm can be viewed in a parallel light to the revision processes involved in written and other forms of composition. This parallelism facilitates students’ awareness of the nature and influence of the revision process for the benefit of their own textual revision.

Inhabiting the various corners and niches of film theory, these parallel points that connect film to literature, art, new media, and other forms constitute a fertile soil for the study of the relationships between parts in dialogic meaning-making.. The process of editing shots of single images together to create a specific and powerful message is subject to the dialogic effects of combination just as the process of arranging phonemes and morphemes creates meaning for the oral or written rhetor. The editing process has the power to transcend time and space in the rearranging of still image shots to achieve a particular composed reality.

Soviet film theorist Lev Kuleshov viewed editing as a “structuring of elements,” and the director asserted that this act of organization “shaped the meaning of the images” (qtd. in Kovacs 36). Kuleshov leaves no doubt that he saw potential in applying linguistic models to filmic discourse. He claimed that “the shot is a sign, a letter for montage” (qtd. in Kovacs 36). The shot, as Kuleshov refers to it here, is the framed collection of static images—a unit of meaning predating language and writing in its close relationship to the point of view of visual perception. The individual field of vision is a primary medium for meaning-making. One must only look to McLuhan’s definition of a medium to find that the content of the field of vision—a medium—can be film—a medium: “the ‘content’ of any medium is always another medium” (8)

The field of vision is closely related to the kino-eye in its process of production. Both film and vision consist of collections of static images gifted motion through repetition. In the case of film the images are photographs arranged by an editor and projected by the cinematic apparatus; in the case of vision the images are a series of nerve-relays arranged by the brain and projected by the apparatus of the eye. These processes are not so dissimilar to reading or listening to interpret linguistic meaning. The medium may be different, but the content—*meaning* itself—is always the same. The writer frames letters in words and words in pages, choosing their arrangement carefully to convey his message; the film editor does the same, but with a collection of cinematic shots. K.K. Wissman elucidates a similar perspective on photography, “[e]nvisioning photography as a social practice recognizes that the images produced are not simply a transparent recording of reality; rather, the images encapsulate a particular framing of that reality that is highly intentional and unique to the individual photographer” (14).

***Visual Revision Group Project:***

Students will collect image samples—still or moving—and use them to create group “film” projects. The visuals for this project can be “found” articles, plucked from Youtube, Flickr, a magazine, or a Facebook page. Or students can choose to creative original clips, produced by the group members with digital recording devices. Using one of many powerful editing platforms, like iMovie or Final Cut, students can make editing decisions; arranging their still and moving images in a particular order designed to convey their message.

The impact of the order of images on the overall message of the video highlights the impact of design, editing, and revision. Introducing filmic editing theories can help to outline the functions through which the combination of parts achieve the meaning of their design.

For example, Eisenstein’s montage theory hinges on the principle of “collision” between different shots to illustrate the ideas of thesis and antithesis. The filmmaker based his collage-like collisions of shots on conflicts of scale, volume, rhythm, speed of motion, direction of motion, as well as conceptual themes such as class and power. Eisenstein viewed each frame in a film as a brick colliding with adjacent bricks, creating meaning through proximity and collision.

Figure 1 *Potemkin* Eisenstein

As students compose their videos, the impact of the order and arrangement of visual imagery on the overall message of the composition will becomes transparent in a way that the written arrangement of words rarely does to the novice writer. Drawing a parallel between the editing of visual frames in a video and the revision of words, sentences, and paragraphs in a text; this project aims to utilize student involvement with visual texts to elucidate the process of written arrangement: revision.

**Breaking Down the System: Derrida & McLuhan**

Before exploring the application of further new media and new literacy to the classroom, I will extend my theoretical platform in an exploration of some of the meaning-making paradigms that inform our lives and the terms of theory that intersect with the dialogic sphere.

This extension of perspective is critical to forming a foundation from which to build effective classroom practices, adding more critical viewing lenses to the available repertoire.

Genre, process, relationship: these terms all refer in some way to structure. Structures are an essential part of composition studies. Process, post-process, positivism, expressionism: each represents a restructuring of the composition of writing pedagogy. In an intellectual sense each act of restructuring is revolutionary: born of the tension between parts of an inevitably flawed structure. After these revolutions the tensions of the old structure give way to the tensions of the new one: the old parts rearranged and introduced to new elements create new points of pressure and often increase the pressure of old tension points not addressed by the revolution. The study of structure composes a healthy portion of the pie of composition studies. If education is to elucidate the constitution of discursive structures at a pace that keeps with the proliferation of discursive forms in contemporary culture, the intersecting spaces of visual and digital literacies must be unfettered in the context of composition pedagogy for curriculum building. Such spaces, constitute environments populated richly with discursive structures –for composition students to explicate.

Jacques Derrida in *Writing and Difference* explains that structures, whether material or discursive, must be “methodically threatened” so they may be “comprehended more clearly” to “reveal […] [the structure’s] supports” as well as that “secret place” in which the structure is “neither construction nor ruin” (6) but parts stressed to the point of flux. Kenneth Boulding refers to this moment, or space, as a “break boundary,” that point in time in which a system reaches the condition where it “suddenly changes into another or passes some point of no return in its dynamic processes (qtd. in McLuhan 38).” So as Derrida suggests applying stress methodically to probe structures, Boulding writes about the phenomena itself—the moment after the explosives have discharged but before the blast radius has scattered the building—that “point of no return.” Each discipline intersects, collides, impacts each other discipline in the dialogic sphere of meaning. Boulding’s “break boundaries” are similar to those spaces illustrated by the metaphor of the Venn Diagram in which intellectual zones share in dialogic exchange. The proclivity of Western thought—to which our pedagogy is inextricably bound—often creates structures that contort the dialogic meaning-making relationships within. Western man is prone to “splitting and dividing all things as a means of control” (McLuhan 1), sifting through pieces of rubble as if they were always scrap and never parts of a cohesive whole. As if studying one piece of the wreckage could tell the epic story of the crash.

Derrida refers to his intentional stressing of structures as “soliciting” (6). He explains his use of the term through an explanation of the word’s etymology form the Latin *soliciting* back to archaic Latin terms *sollus* ‘the whole,’ and *citare* ‘to put in motion (6)”. Derrida translates this as “shaking in a way related to the whole.” He views this process as opening a “liberty” of “critical disengagement” which allows for a “solicitude for and an opening into reality” (6). Derrida, in part, describes here the process of self-realization that must occur in the learner in order for the learner to decipher her *self* from the sum of internalized discourses that compose her culturally constructed identity: to distinguish her *character* from *a character.* Derrida’s reference to an “opening into reality” is a point on a discursive linearity that runs from Plato’s analogy of the cave to Mitchell’s notion of the critical eye and outlines the illuminative human experience.

Figure 2 Miscellaneous engagements with public art: Barbara Hepworth, De Young Museum (2006)

The act Derrida describes of “shaking” a structure to agitate the ideas or objects within as they are related to the “whole” relies on the relationship of part to whole and part to part in order to create or find new or deeper meaning that cannot be uncovered through a homogenous, tension-free medium. The “solicitude” to which Derrida refers consists of isolating the individual being from the homogenizing effects of discursive cultural structures. This isolation allows the individual to perceive their own relation as one of many interrelated subsidiaries of a whole. Once these relationships have been perceived the fashion in which they create meaning in the spaces and collisions between parts become available for study; their structures can be shaken to see what fruits of meaning pop loose.

Derrida proffers his own metaphor to illustrate the importance of a space of solitude, or knowledge of one’s place, claiming “when one no longer has the force to understand force from within itself […] form fascinates” (4). This fascination with forms echoes Marshall McLuhan’s statement about the “true Narcissus style” of a person “hypnotized by the amputation and extension of his own being in a new technical form” (11). McLuhan refers to new forms of technology and media as “amputations” of the human being which become separated by the process of their becoming external. Here McLuhan asserts that the relationship that can develop between humanity and their media extension can induce the cathartic state of hypnotization. Derrida potently refers to the essence of the “real” as force. Derrida makes a call to recognize the power of force as something essential to engaging with media through awareness and not somatization.

The potential for the shock , disconnect, and numbness of somatization exists as the result a process of extension, repetition, and removal that results in the production and consumption of media structures. McLuhan outlines the phenomena of somatization and the causes behind its effect; he employs the Greek myth of Narcissus to illustrate:

The youth Narcissus mistook his own reflection in the water for another person. This extension of himself by mirror numbed his perceptions until he became the servomechanism of his own extended or repeated image. The nymph Echo tried to win his love with fragments of his own speech, but in vain. He was numb. He had adapted to his extension of himself and had become a closed system (41)

Extension, the first stage of the process, McLuhan explains, refers to these “extensions of ourselves” (42) which exist—in one form—in the medium of visual culture, populated by limitless repetitions of images born of the extension of human perception, composition, and production. McLuhan explains the causes for the human proclivity toward extension are numerous because “all extensions of ourselves, in sickness or in health, are attempts to maintain equilibrium” (42). McLuhan explains this tendency as the creation of “artificial situations that rival the irritations and stresses of real life under controlled conditions of sport and play” (42): this is because “both pleasure and comfort are strategies of equilibrium for the central nervous system” (43). According to this viewpoint, extension appears as an infrastructure for both the curative and the preventive, whether the ailment or threat is related to physiology, the psyche, or the material status quo. And such a system, McLuhan makes clear, has roots in human physiological needs.

The erection of this infrastructure of extension, while still occurring and at a faster rate than ever, began prior to the record of human history—a record requiring a language which is itself an extension of humanity and must stand on the foundation of systematic self-extension that predates the linguistic stage as it is understood. Recorded, or written, discourse represents an extension of language into the visual field—a deliberate intrusion predated only by those visible movements involved with speech. The progressive intrusion of language—crudely viewed as the extension of human thought—into new fields of perception is symptomatic of one of the effects of extension, as described by McLuhan. Imperative to understanding the somatization of the Narcissuss Myth, “amplification” (McLuhan 42) is indicative of the process of extension. Amplification is brought about through extension by the “new intensity of action” caused by the extension of a human form to a medium outside the body dedicated to this “separate or isolated function” (Mcluhan 42). The walking feet become the turning wheel, the mortal face of an actor become timeless in its motion on a 30-foot screen, words dying on the air become imprints of language on stone, paper, and dimly glowing screens: imprints that transcend the spatial and the temporal in ways the human form, the root of this extension, can never match.

(It should be noted that this process—transparently dialogic—represents a visual/verbal space rich for interdisciplinary study).

The repetition stage of McLuhan’s media process is at once obvious and complex. Repetition is essential to language and its extensions—including written and symbolic forms. An understanding of systematic repetition is required in order to participate in language, and repetition manifests materially on cave walls and wiki pages affected through finger paints and binary digital linguistics. Gutenberg’s press represents the most emblematic of advancements humanity has made in the march to improve the ability to repeat self-extension, spurning a proliferation of the oral tradition of extension into visual form.

This process of repetition is closely tied to production, and as a result, imbued with the potentiality of Derrida’s *force*. The energies required of the creative actions necessary to produce repetition is representative of this *force*. It is this creative spark that separates the second stage of McLuhan’s process from the somatization of the third stage: removal. In the human psyche’s journey through the three stage process toward equilibrium, once the creative processes of extension and repletion have been surpassed, the destructive end of the process—somatization through amputation—sets in. Once a human form has been extended beyond the natural medium of the human body—subsequently amplified—and repeated, its removal from the human form becomes inevtibale. This is because the amplification of the form “is bearable by the nervous system only through numbness or blocking of perception” (McLuhan 43). In terms of the Narcissuss Myth, McLuhan explains:

[t]he young man’s image is a self-ampuation or extension induced by irritating pressures. As counter-irritant, the image produces a generalized numbness or shock that declines recognition. Self-amputation forbids self-recognition (43)

To the composition instructor involved in orienting students in their interaction with media—through the act of composition—the example of Narcissuss calls out for action in the composition classroom: action become force through creative and productive engagement with discourse, rather than compulsory interaction at the level of mirroring discursive formats. This disengaged type of interaction is given to retreat to the role of detached observer, leaving the individual stripped of their discursive force and subject to the numbness born of somatization.

As the story of Narcissus suggests, the issue of somatiziation—as humans appear to become the static components of the mediums they passively observe—is not novel to modernity, but in fact extends beyond the origins of the generic media forms that populate contemporary discourse. As McLuhan’s ontology of media explains, such forms are born as extensions of human capacities. Imagination and the possibility for creation is an essential human capacity. Derrida explains the link between creation and the potentiality of force, claiming “for modern art, the work is not expression but creation” (302). In the modern era meaning--once synonymous with expression—has been revaluated as a result of the extensive proliferation of expressive media forms which weaken the artistic value of pure expression beginning a shift in aesthetic paradigms.

Much like the discovery of new tools allowed for the revelation of a component of matter buried within the atom, new critical tools now allow for the revelation of the act of creation as a component of meaning buried within expression. McLuhan’s theory of media by the extension and amputation of human capacities certainly offers a grim interpretation of the future of human creativity as intellectual and artisitc attention turns to gaze as this forceful act of creation. As the creative process is uncovered and extended through systematization it becomes vulnerable to the process of amputation described by McLuhan. No longer, explains Derrida, does the “literary fact language is one with meaning” and that “form belongs to the content of the work” (302) apply to modern aesthetics and meaning-making. Forms and content, language and meaning, the modern discursive landscape is littered up and down with an abundance of these, such an environment can only invite the curious intellect to crawl further down the rabbit hole to find the source of creation behind the network of human expression, that “force” of which Derrida spoke, which finds sustenance hard to come by in the closed-circuit mind of the somatisized mind, void of creativity and subject to the rule of extension.

Spoken language is certainly one of the extensions that served as prerequisite to the proliferation of media extensions. Not subject to the deliberate material rigidity of written language, spoken language maintains a more inexplicable side, shifting and moving in unpredictable and unconscious directions. Archetypes, born of the oral traditions of ancient cultures, are thus born, in part, of the unconscious of the mass of the human unconscious. These forms passed the lips of countless storytellers, persevering through the crumbling of cultures and societies and the passing of generations. When an oral storyteller related an archetypal tale the archetype was the medium. The generic requirements for an archetypal tale consist of linguistic forms and the repetition of themes carried on the voice of the speaker; these spoken forms were the content of the archetype medium. Of course the voice of the speaker remains the medium for the archetype’s expression, but this relationship only serves to demonstrate McLuhan’s theory that “the ‘content’ of any medium is always another medium” (8). The direct human interaction required of the oral medium—before recording devices—holds somatization at bay as it retains elements of creative force in experiences of exchange within the medium.

As the oral tradition has given way to a proliferation of written media—and now digital media—the oral medium itself has become a component of these new media, and the visual aspect of written language as well—inclusion in these forms has robbed the oral tradition of its active force. McLuhan asserts that “the effect of the medium is made stronger and intense just because it is given another medium as content’” (18). Like the big fish that ate the little fish that ate the tiny fish, new media are swollen on an overwhelmingly dense composition of mediums. It is more important than ever that students are provided experiences in critical thinking, interpretation, and communication, as well as active discursive production. The dialogic nature of mediums becomes clear through this illustration, as each medium depends upon and affects each medium it comes in contact with. As composers take hold of various mediums they are engaging in conversations in which every element—including the composer herself—is imbued with deep networks of meaning and allusion. These networks of meaning are inextricably interwoven with the mediums and modes that allow their production.

Walter Benjamin in his 19th century critique of modes of cultural production writes that “[t]he dialectic of these conditions of production” are quite evident in the discursive “superstructure”—he also claims that these conditions of production are evident in the “economy” (19). Benjamin’s comments hint at the interconnected nature of the modes of cultural production; a melding of material necessity and discursive trend—each element informing the other. The composition process occurs in this ideological space, where material economy meets ideological approach. Benjamin does not describe a space of meaning-making such as this one, but his theories imply the potential for such a break boundary. Marshall McCluhan describes a break boundary as the point within “a medium or structure” at which the “system suddenly changes into another or passes some point of no return in its dynamic processes” (38). These are the moments in which discursive structures become vulnerable to the study of the critical eye.

Benjamin views the systems and processes of meaning-making as self-evident through simple engagement with their end products—the superstructures of culture and economy. Benjamin ignores the need for an “incidence of menace” (Derrida 6) to illuminate structure to perception. Operating under his approach, seeking the foundational paradigms of meaning-making appears more docile than Derrida’s “methodically threaten[ing]” of meaning in order to break through boundaries to perceive these paradigms. Either Benjamin assumes a greater level of human capacity for critical thought or Derrida perceives a greater complexity or perhaps hostility in structures of meaning. Regardless, in the context of the composition classroom, where the goal of fostering critical-thinking abilities is paramount, Derrida’s deconstructionist approach offers an advantage. In addition to a unique perspective on the critical understanding of meaning, Derrida’s theory offers a tool which can be adapted to various tasks in the composition classroom. Benjamin offers a perspective for critical-thought, but he assumes his theoretical viewing lens to be self-evident once approached. Additionally, Derrida’s narrative offers hope of the “liberty” of critical “disengagement” while Benjamin writes his narrative into a pseudo-perceptual-discursive corner, outlining the prison of observation and amputation that media creates. The capability of media to erect structures in service of the phantasmagaoria increases at a near exponential level as technology improves and, inevitably, proliferates—birthing new discursive forms and introducing established discursive forms to new regions and cultures.

***Shaking Up Visual Media***

While it has been theorized that society has a collective unconscious mind—composed by the collectivity of human nature—no conscious mind oversees the composition of the network of cultural discourse. A person—in navigating the sea of media that composes life in the post-information age—can make certain selections as to the texts that will be included in the composition of their identity. They may also choose which experiences to emphasize and which perspective to adopt in filtering media experiences. This process of identity formation consists of the ordering of parts to create a whole, in this case a complete identity. This dynamic arrangement of parts in order to create meaning-making relationships through proximity, distance, and hybridization is an essential component of critical composition. As Peggy Albers and Jerome C. Harste emphasize in their article “The Arts, New Literacies, and Multimodality” it is essential that composition classrooms “examine which texts endow us with an identity we may or may not wish to take on” (6). The tools of new literacies, critical analysis, and self-reflection are the armaments with which composition instructors can equip their students to tackle the complex task of discursive identity formation through the selection and ordering of a variety of discourses.

Addressing the topic of combining the building-block units of meaning to produce compositions requires not only a dialogic perspective, but—almost implicitly—an interdisciplinary one as well. Work in analysis and production address the meaning-making processes of visual and verbal expressions. Studying the verbal and the visual together creates opportunities to study *break boundaries* and *shake systems,* increasing critical understanding of composition in the process. Ultimately the visual medium proves the optimal companion for studies of the written medium due the operative nature of the two discursive mediums which allow “associations between the expression of themes” in written texts and “visual motifs” which serve to “integrate verbal and visual expressions” (Childers 100).

Earlier in this same text co-author Eric Hobson addresses the multi-modal quality of composition: “Having studied and collaborated with artists who work in many mediums, we believe the linkages that connect the composing processes they manipulate to create their work seem absurdly obvious” (2). The palpable structure of composition, as described here by Hobson, seems, initially, to contradict Marshall Mcluhan’s view of a media paradigm that requires careful study to penetrate and is intrinsicly difficult to decipher. While Mcluhan believes that many individuals “fail to study media at all” (9) and those who do are faced with a media system that “shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action” (9); the reason for difficulty in penetrating the underlying function and meaning of media, Mcluhan claims, is the result of a process in which “the ‘content’ of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium” (9).

Upon closer examination of the rhetorical phrasing of Hobson’s remark, however, suggests that the in Hobson’s view a certain level of experience and knowledge is necessary in order to view the system as self-evident. In the case of Hobson’s artists working across mediums and genres provided them with this perspective. Described in this way, Hobson’s perspective can be viewed as a process Derrida’s deconstructionist approach which requires a methodological menacing of structure toward an end: a revelation of the ordering of its parts. If this is indeed the case, and Hobson is a reluctant deconstructionist, then his “study” and “collaboration” with artists who express meaning through “many mediums” must constitute this aggressive posture or action of laying one’s ethereal hands on the ideological beams and bricks of a discursive structure and shaking the whole to reveal the parts: menacing the system as the biblical Samson menaced the pillars of the Temple of Dagon:

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:SamsonDestroyTemple.jpg)And **Samson** took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left. / And **Samson** said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life. (Judges 16: 29-30)

And just as Samson overcame the bounds of blindness in his bold action, asking the Lord to “strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes” (Judges 16:28) so too does the student—menacing rhetorical and cultural edifices—move beyond the limits of blindness to find the mechanisms of meaning laid out, made visible.

Hobson’s phrasing in this particular excerpt seems to credit “study” and “collaboration” as the prerequisites to the revelation of discursive structures. He ties these two experiences to a present perfect participle—“having”—which signifies that these actions occur prior to the action of the verb. Hobson possesses this knowledge because of experiences that preceded this possession. Certainly, this lends itself to an interpretation of Hobson’s statement as an occurrence of Derrida’s deconstructionist shaking. It is this dual undertaking of “study” and “collaboration” (in work) that is capable of unpinning the fetters of the *critical-eye,* revealing the “linkages that connect composing processes” in a revelation so clear that the dialogic networks of meaning-making become visible to the point of being “absurdly obvious” (Hobson 2).

Figure Samson. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samson

Of course, not just any study or collaborative artistic expression will suffice, but such an endeavor is required that would reach across multiple mediums, leading the researcher and artists through a variety of boundary breaking experiences: revelatory experiences born of that moment of flux that occurs in the temporal space between the no-longer-this and the not-yet-that; the type of work that requires dabbling in multiple genres or multiple media. Such work need not be burdened with unnecessary complexity, Hobson explains that a task such as sketching can spark these learning opportunities as sketching can sharpen [students’] observation, understanding and recollection” (100). When activities like these are introduced to the composition classroom, Hobson explains, the intention is to “[focus] students’ attention on their own visual experiences” in order to engage with the “collaborative nature of interpretation, sharpen their observational skills and explore the intersections of the visual and the verbal” (118). As students explore various genres and media in this fashion, the multi-genre project offer a valuable framework for the arrangement of these creative endeavors.

**Multi-Genre Projects**

The cross-influences of genres that occur in multi-genre works are but another example of the dialogic nature of composition. Of course relationships in meaning-making cannot be limited to any collection of units, dialogic interaction occurs at all levels of composition. The English alphabet contains only 26 letters, all but a few of these letters have no meaning alone but rely on the action of interrelationship with other letters to express meaning beyond a single phonetic utterance. The existence of minimal pairs in phonetics illustrates a basic dialogic relationship and the sensitive properties of meaning-making through language. These word pairs are separated only by one phoneme: “cat” and “rat”, for example. The single phoneme acts with enough force on the others to completely change their combined meaning from a feline to its prey. Words—the structures erected by the combination of letters—are also subject to the affects of assembly. Sentences, paragraphs, books, photographs, films, internet discussion boards, and web pages all build meaning in this way, relying on the tension between what came before and what follows after.

The global sphere of textual discourse develops in a similar fashion new forms of literature, visual expression, digital technology, etc. are glommed into the rolling snowball of human discourse. While dialogic engagement with later texts will alter the discursive meaning of an ancient text, as tensions posited by one are addressed by the other, the ancient text cannot be reordered or deleted from the discursive composition. The static order of texts in any give discourse is unavoidable and as a result the structure of discourse has traditionally evolved in a linear fashion; the text leaving the hands of the “author” to solidify its position in the public cultural narrative. This cultural narrative is composed of the dialogic relationships between all human discourses—discourses ultimately bound to the geneology of their production: authorial, cultural, temporal, or otherwise.

Hobson demonstrates that both textual and visual works are composed by similar processes and act through relationship and innate generic knowledge acquired through repeated exposure in order to create meaning. While the vocabulary utilized in the study of these compositional forms differ, metaphor—an effective educational tool—serves as the mechanism for accessing the parallels in the different processes. Students pre-existing, albeit incomplete, frameworks of visual literacy offer a vast pool from which to draw when forming new connections and deepening understanding in the composition classroom.

Tom Romano in *Blending Genre, Altering Style: Writing Multigenre Papers* integrates a dialogic approach to his composition curriculum. He describes the relationship between multiple genres and the collaborative collage they form, explaining the development of meaning which is expressed through both the encapsulation of each genre within its own framework and the hybridization bred in the contact zones created by the inclusion of multiple forms. A good multi-genre project, explains Romano, is a “multilayered, multivoiced blend of genres, each revealing information about [the] topic, each self-contained, making a point of its own, unconnected to other genres by traditional devices” yet each “working in concert with the others create[s] a single literary experience” (4). Like a building block or “a color slide, complete in itself” (Romano 4) coming together with other blocks or slides through a particular design to create a building or a multi-media demonstration, the placement of each genre within the collage has an impact on the final product.

Like the collaborative artists Hobson described who worked in multiple mediums, these multi-genre texts—the result of genre blending—are powerful agents of boundary-breaking, they differ from the multi-modal work described by Hobson in that they incorporate different mediums or genres in one piece of work. What Hobson refers to as a more linear experience of boundary-breaking in which the artist or research tackles different mediums, but not necessarily at the same time. Romano describes the interaction of multiple genres when these genres are included as cohesive parts of a whole. The difference is in the arrangement of these learning experiences—these parts—of the learning journey. The close proximity of a variety of modes in the multi genre that Romano describes effects a more dynamic dialogism between these parts, more clearly illuminating these interactions.

The idea of encapsulating a number of boundary-breaking experiences in one text offers the possibility for maximizing the density of learning in a compositional space. While curriculum is limited by the temporal restraints of the classroom, making research and collaboration in many mediums an unwieldy prospect in a one-semester format, multi-genre composition resides in a rich and concise environment composed of multiple discursive networks engaged in the dialogic process of meaning-making. This compact format incorporates easily into the limited space of the composition curriculum.

The dialogic exchange between genres in the multi-genre paper offers an opportunity to reverse the process of Derrida’s “incidence of menace” (6), constructing a whole from an assemblage of parts in order to find the arch of meaning that such a dialogic combination concocts. This exchange between genres offers unique perspectives by approaching topics from a fractured—or even cubist—point of view. Romano emphasizes the importance of steeping students in a multitude of genres before and during the composition of a multi-genre piece: “The more experienced in reading and writing a multitude of genres, the more productive, inventive, and accomplished students will be with their multigenre papers” (44).

Romano attests to the importance of the visual as a source of genre in the composition classroom, not limiting the genres in multi-genre texts to written forms and sewing his text with pro-visual rhetoric. His choices of poetry forms for his classroom—haiku and contemporary free verse—have been selected because they “revel in imagery” (Romano 97), and he includes an example of a student’s free verse in which the student “used photographs through her entire paper to enhance her fine writing” (Romano 37). It is clear in this last excerpt that Romano does not allow the infusion of imagery to lower the standard of written composition in the classroom.

Romano explains that visuals do not simply supplement written genres, but in fact act as their own genre, informing the writing and being informed by the writing; contributing in ways other non-visual genres cannot. He also emphasizes the visual aspects of genres that in which the visual aspects are not typically emphasized: poetry and drama, he explains, create visuals in the mind advancing readers’ understanding of the word.

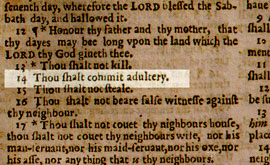
 A “dramatic scene,” Romano writes, does not simply “inform” but “sets characters in motion” revealing meaning through words spoken by the movements of lips and actions and interactions carried out by the visible bodies on stage: in this way drama “appeals to our sense of visual imagery, especially visual imagery that moves” (Romano 71). Choreographed and scripted, the deliberate actions of the stage share key elements with written composition. Both mediums require visual elements—letters or stage crafts and actors—to express a message. The integrity of this message hinges on the adherence of the medium to the message’s truth. Simple changes in word order or paragraph organization, or even a simple typographical error can render a translation of a sacred literary text an abomination. A 1631 King James edition of the bible, printed by Robert Barker and Martin Lucas, contained a single typographical error that earned the edition the term *wicked bible* and earned the printers a fine of 300 pounds sterling. The blasphemous mistake appears in the printing of the Ten Commandments in which Barker and Lucas omit the “all-important word ‘not’ […] rendering the verse as, ‘Thou shalt commit adultery’” (Greatsite.com). The sweeping effect of this one omission led to a lot of 1,000 bibles, what would have been a holy and valuable commodity in a time when most people could not afford to own books, being destroyed, only a few escaping the decree annihilation. (Greatsite.com)

Figure "Wicked Bible" Greatsite.com

Similarly, changes in costume and set can turn the message of a drama on its head and the angle from which a photograph is shot can transform the impression of the work. Romano suggests using a photograph in the composition classroom as a “creative springboard to dive deeply with language into a topic” explaining that “[c]oupled with photo, words can take readers—and the writer—further in understanding” (100). The multi-genre project of which Romano is a strong proponent offer students an opportunity to explore the visual languages that these genres employ and to toy with the interrelationship of the visual and the verbal.

Integrating the information in this text into a multi-genre unit in a classroom would aid student understanding of categorical notions like genre and media. Coupled with deconstructionist tools and a dialogic perspective, this knowledge serves to increase student understanding of genres and serves to empower their writing, expand their perspectives, and increase their skills of critical analysis and active production. The dialogic nature of the multi-genre paper is a powerful operative force behind the development of new connections or relationships in the student mind. The multi-genre text is a rich space for students to deconstruct systems and fish their own meanings from the vast pool of verbal and visual language.

***Facebook as Multi-genre Collage Project***

Splashed across countless computer screens across the world are what appear to be random combinations of visual and verbal information framed by the white and blue spaces of Facebook. Upon logging on to Facebook, a user –unless otherwise specified by the user—is presented with a view of their news feed page. This page is composed of the status updates of a select group of other Facebook accounts as chosen by the user. In this way a Facebook user creates a constant multi-media feed based on their interests. The daily specials from a favorite restaurant, a video of the local weather report, a photograph of a family member’s baby, and a friend’s latest rant about his job: these disparate elements share a common queue through the Facebook news feed. This continuous stream of media creates a kind of multi-genre collage. In the context of the Facebook News Feed the organizing theme of the digital collage is the user’s interest or attention. The user creates this collage of attention by choosing to “like” business, interest, and organization pages and by choosing to accept or ignore other users as “friends.” A Facebook user’s wall also forms a multi-genre collage from the same media pool as the News Feed; however, the organizing theme of the Wall is constituted of the user’s personal—yet public—communications.

From a critical point of view the potential for discovery in these Facebook multi-genre collages lies in the revelation of constructed persona or self-controlled identity. Users can choose to omit or provide false information, and select interests based on the particular persona they wish to portray to the rest of the Facebook community.

**Visual Culture**

*“The illiterate of the future will be the person ignorant of the use of the camera as well as of the pen.”* –Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, 1936, quoted in Traub 1982, 23.

Why choose to pursue the relationship between the visual medium and the composition classroom from among the long list of other cultural mediums with which composition shares a dialogic relationship? The answer is simple, if disciplinary boundaries are viewed as a vast system of viewing lenses then the techniques and approaches of these branches of knowledge might be viewed as sprouts of the trunk—once the viewer has isolated herself from the system—and these tools can then be utilized cross-disciplinarily. In essence, visuality, in this context, functions as the grand metaphor for this approach to composition studies. *Seeing* the inner machinations of a system, *seeing* the relationships that constitute networks, *seeing* the world revealed through a critical perspective, *seeing* the space occupied by one’s own writing in the greater discourse: viewing composition studies in this way emphasizes the need for discovery in the classroom and underlines the importance of increasing the alternate modes of literacy and production that are available to composition students.

In “Showing Seeing” W.J.T. Mitchell delves into this notion of *seeing*—as knowing—as opposed to *glancing*—as simply perceiving. Mitchell concerns himself with exposing the underlying composition of human knowledge and perception—those faculties of which media are an extension. Mitchell describes an oppression of self-evidence that surrounds the process of viewing and relegates the act to the periphery, emphasizing the glance and the gaze, while omitting the careful and critical eye. The critical eye, Mitchell claims, represents a danger to the established boundaries of academic disciplines. It would seem that Mitchell’s construction—the critical eye—is an agent of flux, an instigator of *break boundaries*, or perhaps it is the moment of metaphysical visibility that *break boundaries* enable. Either way, the idea of the critical eye is intriguing when viewed in the context of Derrida’s deconstructionist method of studying systems which makes repeated reference to making structures “visible”. What good is visibility if what is seen is not understood—or as Mitchell would put it, truly *seen*? The development of a critical inner-eye in composition students should be sought, not as a tertiary goal to better composition, but as an integral part of the process of creating engaged, critical, writers.

At this point it is important to distinguish between two different aims of the critical eye. One of these aims is to establish an aesthetic framework, the other is to form what Jacques Derrida has called a “dangerous supplement” focused on visual semantics. In the realm of visual semantics viewers consume a steady diet of subliminal messages. Unless the rich history and environment of the visual form is understood as a type of literacy—which it is—the second aspect of the critical eye—the empowerment born of critical awareness—cannot be achieved. This is why Mitchell aims to “overcome the veil of familiarity and self-evidence that surrounds the experience of seeing, and to turn it into a problem for analysis, a mystery to be unraveled” (86), a goal very much in tune with Derrida’s deconstructionist methods of analysis. Mitchell seeks to expose the largely undervalued meaning-making networks embedded in visuality, building an interpretive infrastructure as a platform to a visual literacy that goes beyond aesthetics and art history to include the vast field of objects that fall into the category, visual studies.

Mitchell addresses the rebellious side of this “dangerous supplement” as it pertains to existing discursive structures, explaining that “[v]isual studies threatens to make art history and aesthetics into subdisciplines within some expanded field of inquiry whose boundaries are anything but clear” (88): and the threat is very real. The visual media flooding the discursive channels of modern minds harry the entrenched visual disciplines not just by opening them to “‘outside’ issues that threaten their boundaries” (Mitchell 88) but also through the development of a complementary or supplementary functionality in relation to these established discourses, a relationship that “indicates an incompleteness in the internal coherence of aesthetics and art history, as if these disciplines had somehow failed to pay attention to what was most central in their own domains” (Mitchell 88). Mitchell includes a list of visual forms not addressed in the established fields of visual study—the sheer volume attests to the validity of his argument and the true breadth of visuality:

[…] scientific and technical imaging, film, television, and digital media, as well as as philosophical inquiries into the epistemology of vision, semiotic studies of images and visual signs, psychoanalytic investigation of the scopic ‘drive,’ phenomenological, physiological, and cognitive studies of the visual process, sociological studies of spectatorship and display, visual anthropology, physical optics and animal vision, and so forth and so on (88).

The inclusion of this wide array of topics in the field of visual studies, according to Mitchell, is viewed by the art-world as a sort of Trojan horse which will weaken the field from the inside out, prompting the “leveling of semiotic distinctions between words and images, digital and analog communication, between art and non-art, and between different kinds of media, or different concrete artifactual specimens” (92). As fields traditionally based on firmly established interpretive and valuative meaning-making networks, aesthetics and art history will likely reach a break-boundary at some point in the near future, when the contact zone between art appreciation and the interpretation of visual forms as information will force a change; either in the form of an adaptation or a grand implosion of the existing infrastructure. This process of change is certainly a rich opportunity for a deconstructionist analysis of a system in flux.

While it is certainly the case that visual studies have traditionally been entrenched in aesthetics in the discipline of art, the simple fact of their codification does not exclude aesthetics and art history from the dialogic sphere in which meaning-making occurs. Visual culture, in my eyes, represents an acknowledgement of a necessary evolution that has occurred as a result of environmental pressures in the visual field. The inherently interdisciplinary realm of visual culture allows for the possibility of a new semiotic space for experts and students from all avenues of study to enter a productive analytical dialogue. Mitchell aims to expose the constructs of this virtual space of semiotic perception, and, although his article is illuminating, his discourse really amounts to a historical narrative of visual theory.

Visuality, he explains, is the object of visual culture studies, as logic is the object of studies in rationality. Problems in academic politics arise when an object of study is marked by multiple territorial claims. In the case of visual culture, Mitchell reveals, the study itself is the object of another field, cultural studies. In order to construct an overview of the elements of visual culture as they relate to composition, Mitchell follows the path of theoretical development that visual studies have progressed, emphasizing the “highly imperfect representations” that have “mediated” the contact zone between visual studies, traditional art history, “the specificity of things we see,” and “verbal description” (88). From grammatology, which “promoted the visible signs of written language” (Mitchell 89) to iconology, which challenged the aura of art and artifact by analyzing “what a picture represents, or what it means” (Godzic 153), to “pictographs to hierogliphics to alphabetic scripts to the invention of printing and finally of digital media” (Mitchell 89) knowledge of the evolution of what Mitchell refers to as “parasitical supplements” (89) –adendums that have historically functioned within the academy as entities secondary to “an original” Mitchell refers to as “phonetic language-as-speech” (89). In his narrative of visual theory, Mitchell provides the outline for a critical analysis of the constructed nature of both visuality and language, naturally lending his work to interdisciplinary study.

Kerry Freedman writes *Teaching Visual Culture* intending to address education in the visual arts, but her approach to teaching “through the realm of visual culture, inside and outside of schools” (2) seems to suggest that new digital media might serve as an excellent source of visual culture study due to the broad spectrum accessibility of the digital medium. This idea can be applied to the composition classroom as well. Freedman stresses that visual culture study thrives on the “object[s], ideas, beliefs, and practices that make up the totality of humanly conceived visual experience” (2). It seems that Freedman would leave no stone unturned in her study—inside or outside of the classroom. She understands the necessity of following the implications of relationships, both theoretical and corporeal, in the sphere of dialogic exchange; also, she understands the importance of avoiding a one-dimensional approach to the study of thought, and asserts that visual experience “shapes our thinking about the world and leads us to create new knowledge through visual form” (2). Building visual literacy to cope with this proliferation of visual forms is an important tenant that should be pursued in the composition classroom.

The blending of visuality and composition when approached with an informed plan, and the force of consistent creativeness, can be seemlessy implemented in the composition classroom. Professor K. Johnson, of York College of Pennsylvania, implemented her “Service Learning Project” in the spring of 2009. Her project successfully created an environment where visuals and words were used to create hybrid texts for specific audiences and for a specific purpose. The strengthening of visual literacy and writing skills is complimented in Johnson’s project by an interdisciplinary component: allowing students to utilize the tools of their current fields of study. The drive of the Service Learning Project is to “provid[e] a much-needed service for local organization” with the aim of providing “satisfaction for the [student] writer” and opening student writers to “different types of composing that [are] particularly suited to unique rhetorical situations” (Johnson 2). The Service Learning project clearly demonstrates the qualities set forth as desirable in the earlier sections of this exploration.

Johnson’s classroom practice engages the students in multiple media and multiple genres as well as a diverse audience that extends beyond the classroom, introducing students to a plethora of dialogic relationships through which they can learn and also inform. Johnson explains that this type of boundary-breaking project promises to “create innovative learning experiences through field work and collaborative engagements,” (2) and allows students to “[research] unique problems embedded within organizations. This type of investigation of organizations—or structures—as Johnson explains it, certainly rings of Derrida’s deconstructionist metaphor of tearing apart a building to study its parts. Johnson’s emphasis on the reaching an outside audience and collaborative composition support a dialogic approach to composition pedagogy.

Though visuality was not necessarily built into the Service Learning project as a requirement, the multimodal nature of the real-world and the project’s emphasis on addressing the real-world rhetorical needs of a specific group, breed hybridizations of the visual and the verbal. Poster advertisements, news articles complete with photography, and multi-media advertising campaigns were just a few of the projects Johnson’s students composed. While some of the projects do not develop visual elements—such as one group of students’ radio advertisement campaign—each project contains a spark of that multimodal force that drives the development of new types of literacy. This is the crest of discursive avant-garde, and if composition instructors hope to remain relevant in the eyes of students bombarded constantly by new literacies that threaten the authority—or perhaps even the relevance—of certain more traditional modes in their lives we must test the waters, check the weather for hints of a wave, and ride the surf of new media, no matter how tumultuous the endeavor may seem. The potentiality offered to those who would stay abreast of the ever-developing network of human minds and media is a powerful force.

Kerry Freedman’s *Teaching Visual Culture* is indicative of the interdisciplinary approach that must be brought to the study of visuality. She approaches the topic from a visual arts perspective, but the insights in the text can serve to support critical thinking in the composition classroom as well. Her view of visually-oriented education necessarily crosses disciplinary boundaries as it embodies a dialogic perspective:

An education in the visual arts takes place in and through the realm of visual culture, inside and outside of schools at all educational levels, through the object, ideas, beliefs, and practices that make up the totality of humanly conceived visual experience; it shapes our thinking about the world and leads us to create new knowledge through visual forms (Freedman 2).

Freedman’s statement *“[n]ew knowledge through visual forms”* (2) has the ring of truth in the age of the multi-media phantasmagoria: a tenant gracefully offered to instructors of any academic discipline. Intended for the art classroom, the fact that her book is so applicable to the modern composition classroom serves to demonstrate the inherently interdisciplinary nature of visual culture. Freedman acknowledges this interdisciplinarity and concedes that visual culture is becoming increasing multi-modal in the digital age. New digital media for expressing visuality require new pedagogical approaches in order to properly prepare students to thoughtfully participate in a proliferating visual culture where the acceleration of the process of becoming worn out makes everyone’s technical awareness vulnerable. The epochs of thought have given way to digitized bytes.

Paramount to Freedman’s exploration of visual education is the discovery of meaning within visuality. Like Mitchell, Freedman recognizes the visual field as a vehicle of meaning as well as aesthetic beauty. The interaction of context, visual design, and imagination promote the extension of learning and lays the foundation for meaning. This sort of interaction, stretching the bounds of what is perceived as self-evident, is aimed at helping students to develop a critical and complex awareness of the visual culture that permeates their lives. Freedman expresses this desire for a more aware community by uncovering the social life of art, emphasizing the dialogic nature of visual metaphors—visible capsules of meaning—and the people that create and consume them. This awareness is important, Freedman explains, because of the role of such discursive metaphors in forming human identity and laying the groundwork for interpretation, as she explains:

An understanding of metaphor requires a single group consciousness to have been established so that people who encounter the metaphor will be able to suspend disbelief, access a meaning for both parts of the metaphor, and accept the new relationship established between them (thereby connecting one agreed upon meaning to another) (56).

As do many visual culture theorists and educators, Freedman broaches the topic of the unconscious. While many theorists note that visual meaning is often relegated to the unconscious mind, Freedman posits the idea of a mass social unconscious that creates the context for the generation of meaning in imagery. This form of group knowledge lends legitimacy to meaning, be it visual or verbal, but in the case of the visual there is no set guide for translation, only a submersed social framework of agreed upon relationships. Freedman refers to a curriculum that takes into account visual culture, its history, its impact on behavior, and its dialogic relationship with meaning as a curriculum of collage: one that brings together seemingly disparate elements to make obvious hidden structures through the ruptures caused by the proximity of opposing factors.

***Viewing Facebook in the Classroom***

The embodiment of the canvas—freed from boundaries— and the kino-eye—available for constant viewing and recording—Facebook has become a primary medium for visual expression in the early 21st century. Through processes of extension and acceleration Facebook and other media like it have freed the canvas from its physical boundaries, superseding space to find new audiences and eliminating the need for material mediums. These same processes have empowered the masses through video recording. Joined with Youtube and other file-sharing sites, Facebook serves as a portal for sharing and viewing video. Facebook even boasts brand new live video-chat capabilities.

The next generation of college composition students engage in these visually expressive, digital forms on Facebook, Twitter, youtube, and other platforms on a regular basis; however, this engagement often remains within social paradigms which offer cathartic dissolution of social tension without inspiring critical reflection. The following classroom focus is intended to reorient students’ interactions with digital media toward a more critical perspective on visual forms and the construction of social media. As the shrouded machinations of familiar forms are laid bare before the eyes of students’ a deeper understanding of composition takes hold and new discursive tools become available for use.

***Classroom Focus: Facebook and Video Engagement (FaVE)***

In my graduate work with early-stage college composition students I have experimented with a number of visual themes that fit snugly within Facebook and the Composition classroom. Paired with a first-year remedial writing student for a Writing Partners Project, I employed a Wiki-building site called Pbworks.com to create a communication hub and a one-room digital school (so to speak). The resulting page, <http://writingpartnersproject.pbworks.com>, was ideal for sharing text and visuals (especially video) with the student. By approaching the lessons through multiple-media the student was able to enter a richer dialogue with her ideas, my instruction, and the video illustrations of important themes. Though the visuals are intended to function on a deeper level, the aesthetic appeal of image and color is still an important quality that the video clips add to the lesson wiki pages.

Typically, during the Writing Partners Project, I used video as writing prompts or to illustrate a particular theme or genre—such as persuasive writing. As my student partner tackled persuasive writing in her composition class, we watched videos of image paired with music that engender the pathos of the persuasive text. These videos—including one my student partner found particularly elucidating—can be found on Youtube and quickly posted to Facebook, or in the case of my WPP, to a wiki page. The applications of this capability are plentiful. Whether students are spelunking through clips on the internet to gain a new perspective on an idea, composing and sharing their own clips with classmates, or preparing written responses to the instructor’s and one another’s video writing prompts; these visual elements will foster alternate avenues for learning, audience, and participation.

Smart phones, which encompass the capabilities of a computer in a boiled-down, hand-held format, are now prolific in Western culture. A significant effect of these devices—and other hand-held digital cameras is an extension of the kino-eye. The camera lens now captures both still and moving images at unprecedented levels of immediacy and microcosmic perspective.

Perspective: perhaps the true educational treasure chest buried in the sand dunes of visual, digital technology. Students are very aware of social-media’s ability to convey both a perspective and a persona. As new forms of identification and socialization arise through social media, visuality takes a critical role. Fashion, described by Mcluhan as “the acceleration of the process of becoming worn out” (Page?), has served society as a visual medium for the expression of value and identity. T-shirts emblazoned with concert dates,

**Visuality and the Written Text**

As previously mentioned, with the advent of writing, language—previously expressed only through an aural medium—took on a visual component. Though this visual aspect of the word has often been relegated to a place of practicality or simply a means of conveyance, this expansion of the visual medium to incorporate language—the richest medium for meaning-making—had a profound effect on the way human perception processes visual messages. Richard Shusterman in “Aesthetic Blindness to Textual Visuality” explains that in large the visual has been “regarded as aesthetically irrelevant, as merely a technical means of recording, preserving, and presenting the literary” (87), the oral qualities of writing “have always been held to be aesthetically central to literature” (87). The visual text has come to be viewed as the “object” of literature “a standard end-product” (McLuhan 87), rather than as an integral part of the message or aesthetic.

Michael Emme, in his article “Visuality in Teaching and Research: Activist Art Education,” confirms what Shusterman refers to as the “surprising phenomena” of the “importance of the visual or graphic in the literary text” (87). Emme focuses his analysis on rising tensions between the written text and the visual text in contemporary academic studies and research. Emme seems to describe this relationship as one approaching a moment of *flux* or a *break boundary* due to the build-up of tensions over time. Over “the past several hundred years,” Emme explains, “aesthetic experience” and “the practice of criticism” have acted to “frame our experience of the visual within the rule of language” (61). These attempts to frame one medium within the other diminish the role that visual literacy occupies in the curriculum of academic composition and research.

Though the distinction may be a subtle one, Emme, while succeeding in questioning the primacy of language over visuality, fails to acknowledge the difference between the “realized” role within the academy (which requires pedagogical and curricular recognition) and the unavoidable, real-world, dialogic role of visuality within the academy. Emme questions the often diminutive space that visuals occupy in academic composition and study through theoretical inquiry, backing up his claims through examples of classroom experiments in visual composition.

His students exert the power of visual composition through a number of striking photographic projects. Through the long-standing tradition of self portrait students demonstrate the importance of perspective and visual components in creating meaning through visuals. On student, typically bound to a wheel chair whose self-portrait consists of him sitting cross-legged in a chair, explains “[b]y taking away the chair with wheels it takes away the, ‘Oh! I wonder what happened to him?’ It makes me look independent rather than relying on a mobile chair!” (Emme 59). The student further explains that in the self-portrait he appears like an “ordinary country boy, content with my life not having to worry about stereotypes” (59). Emme’s student acknowledges that stereotopic meaning can be achieved or demolished through the inclusion or exclusion of a single visual artifact in relation to a composition. The critical awareness of the function of elements in creating visual discourse and the self awareness that it entails demonstrate that Emme’s visual photograph project engages students with some of the core goals of the composition classroom.

Another of Emme’s students demonstrates the importance of perspective in her self-portrait which is shot from below, portraying, as the student explains, “a proud, white, upperclass American woman in a respectable, powerful position” (59): All of this from the angle from which the photograph is shot and the physical posture and appearance of the subject and the inclusion of an American flag as the backdrop. The American flag is certainly a harbinger thick with dialogic meaning and represents that element of stereotype that the wheelchair bound student sought to eliminate from his text. Such projects help to reveal the machinations of visual language and the cultural discursive structures that inform these processes of meaning-making. Other projects in Emme’s classes include photographs and written text to create multi-genre pieces, an important genre for a boundary-crossing study that seeks to explore the space between structures—the spaces that define their boundaries, make their cross-disciplinary intrusions possible, and reveal the foundations and machinations of the systems of which they are a part—be those systems material, ideological, visual, digital, etc.

Emme’s approach to testing the relationship between cultural forms like word and visuality is inherently interdisciplinary. His perspective originates in the plane of art criticism and the interpretation of images, but applies to the act of analysis and production across the dialogic spectrum. Discursive exchanges occur across all media and between various types of media as new texts rise to challenge and inform established discourses. In his exploration of the construction of meaning through images, Emme touches on the discourse that develops between images when they are paired with texts: both the history and the politics of this relationship serve as his tools of exploration.

In the West, a developing emphasis on rationality and the equation of the word with thought resulted in the arbitration of imagery, explains Emme. This process of power shift, he claims, has continued to the point where images are almost viewed with distrust; he uses the words of B. Stafford to support the peripheral status of imagery to academic discourse as ‘misleading illusions without the guidance of discourse (2)”. (60) Art criticism, Emme explains, is the branch of art that currently claims a place in the literary realm, yet he also describes art cricitism as if it is the product of a false amputation of the image from the word. This paradox is symptomatic of engaging with a *break boundar*y; the point at which art criticism appears to be part of neither system yet retains the now translucent forms of each.

Emme’s text offers insight into the meaning-making space between the disciplines of art and composition. Pairing his research focus on “the role that more complex and fundamentally visual forms of communication can play” (57) in the realm of meaning side-by-side with Derrida’s deconstructionist exploratory method of “shaking a system” creates a unique viewing lens through which to view composition research and student learning engagement by creating opportunities for awareness—moments in which the dialogic strands of the discursive networks that connect all forms of meaning-making can be perceived. Shusterman explains the attempt to divide the written word from its visual component, utilizing the most sensual of all forms of written art—poetry—to illustrate. In his explanation of this divide—summarized perhaps as the space between art and literature—the weaknesses in the system poke through the contradictions born of the breaking of this disciplinary boundary.

The common view of poetry defines it as “sound and sense but not sight” Shusterman explains, and such a view of literature does not acknowledge the role of the text’s “visual aspect” (88). In order to appreciate the graphic nature of a written text in the traditional view, Shusterman continues, one must “appreciate the work as graphic art, not literature” (88). The disciplinary break boundary becomes clear in Shusterman’s example, the text cannot simply be viewed as one whole artistic expression, but must be awkwardly viewed through separate lenses, one after the other. This attempt to exonerate visuality from the bonds of a single perspective is demonstrative of a moment of flux and demonstrates the inability of the current systems of aesthetics to address the instantaneous, dialogic experience of art in real life. Each discipline attempts to erect paradigms of value—aesthetics—and various means to approach and delineate these paradigms from others. In our contemporary age these disciplinary boundaries often amount to chalk-outlines on the pavement. Academic and artistic disciplines relate dialogically, responding and adapting to one another, but in the digital age each discipline collides with each other discipline at higher rates of velocity resulting in wide blast radiuses of drastic effect.

**Collaborative Study**

This emphasis on a conversational level of the discursive process has been reflected in the work of intellectuals like Kenneth A Bruffee who in “Collaborative Learning and the ‘Conversation of Mankind’ refers to such conversational techniques in the composition classroom as “collaborative learning” (415) and cites the debate between theory and practice as he perceives it. In the discussions of intellectuals, Bruffee purports, collaborative learning is often viewed in “highly theoretical” terms as “a process that constitutes fields or disciplines of study” (416). In the arena of classroom practicality, Bruffee fears, many teachers are “unsure about how to use collaborative learning in what seem to be effective and appropriate ways” in the classroom (416). A dialogic perspective on conversational or collaborative learning would certainly serve to allay the anxieties of this set of teachers as such a perspective emphasizes the conversational environment in which all forms of discourse are produced and analyzed. This awareness of the dialogic sphere eliminates questions of how to introduce collaborative learning to composition classroom, because this mode of learning is intrinsic to discourse. The query then becomes less intimidating, asking instead in what way the collaborative learning that is already present can be best channeled and enriched.

The prerequisites to easing student anxiety over the composition process may indeed be more similar to those required to ease composition teachers’ anxieties about a collaborative learning model informed by dialogics. Social media platforms can benefit this process in the same way they can serve as student tools of inquiry and collaboration, allowing the free exchange of ideas and texts to aid in the construction of developing curricula.

When students are introduced to a vision of rhetoric as links in interconnected and continues chains—conversational responses that can never be the last word—their anxiety over compositional engagement should decrease. Students who view the construction of their texts as a process akin to chiseling letters out of stone, will become better informed about the nature of their work and feel at ease putting down the hammer and picking up a snub-nosed pencil and a dog-eared notebook.

Students who do not learn how to manipulate discourse for the sake of their own compositions will have much more difficulty deciphering the intent of the media which surrounds them: media which is produced by individuals and groups quite adept at manipulating rhetoric to further their own means. Gallagher addresses this potentiality for vulnerability, “[s]tudents (and adults) who cannot identify an author’s purpose will go through life susceptible” (127) he explains with an air of truism. Though seemingly abstract, the view of literacy as a personal defense system—implied in Gallagher’s truism—is quite practical and realistic. Advertisers are not alone in manipulating media toward an economic means,. Computer hackers, scam artists, and identity thieves are becoming increasingly proficient at utilizing new forms of literacy and technology to dupe those left behind by the wave of new literacies.

The process of discursive or rhetorical manipulation is an important goal of critical awareness education, perhaps the most important aspect of this approach to study being the identification of purpose in rhetoric, environment, and rhetor (or author). If the visual space all around us can be recognized as a medium ripe for the expression of ideas, then it must also be recognized that authorial intentions underlie many of the visual experiences that we come across in ever day life. Without the awareness to break down and analyze the visual lexicon that surrounds them, many people will remain susceptible to that which they do not understand.

Awareness of the malleable nature of discourse allows for more meaningful engagement with a variety of media, including visual, social, and digital lexicons. According to the dialogic perspective I am channeling in this study, active engagement entails a paradigmatic process of interaction through relation, a meaning-making collaboration. Kenneth Bruffee’s definition of collaborative learning in the composition classroom clearly outlines active engagement as an essential component of these conversational instruction models or—as I understand such interactions—dialogic models. Bruffee acknowledges collaborative learning is referred to by many different names but, as he observes, the model crops up across curricula as “a way of *engaging* students more deeply with the text and also [as] an aspect of professors’ *engagement* with the professional community” (415) and I would add to this the professors’ engagement with their classroom communities. Certainly, interpersonal classroom relationships represent a primary avenue for collaborative creation, an avenue that should be acknowledged and explored in its many manifestations: whether it be a web-video conference between an instructor and a group of students or a twitter post followed by an entire classroom.

Bruffee’s emphasis on engagement with texts, with knowledge networks, and with other learners certainly does not imply that such engagement—understood as an interactive relationship—is devoid from composition classrooms, but instead expresses a theme of engagement management or optimization. An understanding of the collaborative nature of perceptual experience and a dialogic perspective of meaning-making (and its subsidiary, composition) together provide a platform from which composition instructors can see the dialogic strands that thread through their classroom, composing the relationships in these communities and allowing a broader spectrum of dialogic networks and relationships to permeate the curriculum as tools and objects for study and inspiration.

I agree with Bruffee’s stance toward the current climate of collaborative learning in the composition classroom; I am certainly aware that the suggestion for such models are not new, and in fact many composition classrooms employ a variety of these dialogic learning models. Like Bruffee, I have no illusion that the topic of collaboration is novel, but rather, I hold that it is an area that requires constant monitoring and adaptation by the community of composition pedagogists. As social media continues to gather inertia on the digital highway, the very basics of the way human beings interact will perpetually shift in relation to this inertia. New generations of students—steeped in new forms of technologically facilitated socialization—will require new approaches to collaborative learning in the composition classroom if the classroom community is to act as a relevant force in their lives. It is in this acceleration that I differ from Bruffee, whose discourse is not so closely linked to technology and thus is not influenced by the pressure of the acceleration of becoming worn out that technological mediums are increasingly subject to. Pedagogical research in composition must address this explosion of digital dialects directly, incorporating specific and concrete visual and digital media into classroom practice. The perceived space between the theory of socialized, collaborative learning and its application in the classroom must be narrowed in order reinvent the classroom in the image of the new student and the dialogic literacies that form her world.

Bruffee addresses this space between theory and practice in the composition classroom:

In both these contexts collaborative learning is discussed sometimes as a process that constitutes fields or disciplines of study and sometimes as a pedagogical tool that “works” in teaching composition and literature. The former discussion, often highly theoretical, usually manages to keep at bay the more troublesome and problematic aspects of collaborative learning in what seem to be effective and appropriate ways, it sometimes quite simply fails (416)

The perspective from the platform of a well-informed theory allows for a view of conversational or collaborative learning through visual and digital media that can serve to allay the anxieties of skeptical composition instructors. Such a view of the field of composition—ultimately defined by the relationships between writing instructors, student writers, and the understanding and production of discourse—reveals the outlines of the dialogic environment in which discourse exists. This awareness of the dialogic sphere eliminates questions of how to introduce collaborative learning to composition classroom, because this mode of learning is intrinsic to discourse. The query then becomes less intimidating, asking instead in what way the collaborative learning that is already present in our dialogic environment can be best channeled and enriched. In other words, modes of composition that are typically handcuffed in the composition classroom—smart phones applications, Facebook, Twitter, Instant Message—when recognized as outlets for textual production can be paroled; set free into the classroom under certain guidelines and restrictions to begin contributing to the learning community.

***Three Collaborative Projects in Social Media***

These projects are designed to utilize the media through which students engage with a variety of discursive forms. The time-line and interwoven elements of the project have been selected in order build classroom community, hone student engagement texts over time, and increase student empowerment and ownership of production. Improvement in critical engagement with the texts of others is also an important instructional goal for these exercises, designed to capitalize on collaborative learning processes: inherently encouraging this secondary goal. Third, these projects aim to increase student interactions with the classroom community and communities outside of the classroom by utilizing social media technology to open up new audiences and to make familiar audiences more accessible. Ultimately these projects are designed to stimulate students’ awareness of their own personal launching points into the dialogic sphere of discourse that permeates their lives; helping them to find a trajectory for their endeavors in all manners of composition.

In this particular set of projects, each project is designed to interact with the other and should be presented to the classroom in such a way: the way each project informs the other offers an example of meta-instruction illustrative of the dialogic sphere. Essentially, these three projects form a potential hub for a unit or course in composition studies. While all three of these projects exhibit qualities of collaborative learning, visuality, and other topics I have already addressed, they also foreshadow a number of the perspectives that I shall expand upon in later sections.

From here on, as I continue to infuse this exploration of visual and rhetorical theory with exercises grounded in the particulars of visual, digital, and social media, I will be sure to refer back to these projects. In this way I can create a dialogic network of practical classroom exercises and projects that can serve as useful entities themselves or fertile points for the sparking of new ideas in practice.

**Project One: Viewing Interdisciplinary Perspectives (VIP)**

Overview:

Any disciplinary subject might serve as the uniting hub in the spinning wheel that constitutes the VIP project. In this particular example, visual culture will serve as the common theme around which student research, writing, conversation, and revision will revolve.

Each student selects a topic in a field of their interest that relates to the central hub, visuality.

For example: a history major might choose to focus on the impact of World World II on visual culture, a music major could study the contact zone between the audible sounds of music and their visible representations transcribed on sheets, and a math major would find loads of literature on visuality in geometry. The use of a common theme is designed to promote dialog and collaboration between students as they help orient each other to the shared hub. In my example each student becomes an expert on an aspect of visuality and can relate to the common theme of visuality in their classmate’s papers thus maximizing the dialogic flow of influence through collaborative work.

Objectives:

The range of these projects would be wide; however, these projects would provide students with a useful piece of writing and research in their own field of interest: work that they can later incorporate into their specialized studies. Interdisciplinary cooperation is important to this project, not just for the students but for faculty as well. As Bruffee’s definition of collaborative learning clearly states, collaboration must occur in instrutors’ relationships with their professional academic community. A writing instructor properly engaged with this project will be in contact with professors in the disciplines that his students choose to focus on in their VIP projects. The instructor should take advantage of interdisciplinary collaboration in the following ways: references to jargon-heavy sections in the VIP, cross-disciplinary evaluation (a compare and contrast of the differences in what the humanities and the sciences expect from a thesis statement), suggestions for avenues of research and venues of publication, etc. The limits are endless if faculty is supportive. Students may even have the opportunity to present their VIP project to a class in their field of study.

The aim, of course, is to increase engagement with their writing by empowering them in their relationship to their writing in several ways: allowing them several elements of choice which increases ownership and motivation, increasing the information available to them by honing research skills and encouraging them to take advantage of the expertise of others in the class or in their everyday life, and providing a larger audience for their writing.

**Project Two: Wiki Creation Project (WC)**

Overview:

Student groups (3-5 members) will create and manage a wiki site. The group will decide the form and organization of the wiki while accommodating the required sections: scheduling, communication, question and answer, writing, peer revision, and research links. This wiki site project is a semester-long endeavor for everyone, and if utilized properly, will prove a useful tool for both the sharing of ideas and the facilitation of peer revision in the VIP projects

The instructor should introduce this project by presenting a model wiki page composed of their own writing, revision, etc. Students should be encouraged to stay involved with the instructors wiki throughout the semester; the instructor should also maintain a high level of involvement with this site (posting the syllabus and exclusive extra credit offers on the page are good ways to motivate student navigation to the page).

Objectives:

The practicality of this project to the organization of the class and the formation of a class community that transcends the classroom hold enough values in themselves to justify the use of this project in any classroom. The collaborative aspect of the project and the influence that this allows students to have on one another’s VIP projects demonstrates the dialogic process of meaning-making. The wiki sites also prove valuable hubs for access to media and technology—through the creation of links—that can be used to further the goals of the classroom and all of the projects. Students will also gain experience with quickly growing genres like digital writing.

The wiki site will also prove the point of germination for the third project.

**Project Three: New Society Multi-Genre Project (NSMG)**

Overview:

Social networking sites like Facebook and Myspace have revolutionized societal discursive networks and opened new avenues of dialogic interaction that can be utilized to further the goals of an interdisciplinary and hybrid study.

Massive Multiplayer Online games (MMO’s) such as Everquest and World of Warcraft have allowed online gamers to participate in populating vast digital spaces with characters, stories, songs, and entire worlds; eradicating distance in creating online communities with unique subcultures, genres, and archetypes.

This project is a collaborative journey of creation designed to bring to the classroom the creativity and community offered by social networking sights and MMO’s. Students will collaboratively and individually utilize multiple media and multiple genres. The same student groups from the WC Project are tasked with creating their own society. Each group will employ their wiki page as a launching point for their creation. The limits of this project should be few. Students will be encouraged to take the project in any direction. Some examples for possibilities include: a video montage of images edited into a fictitious video-history of their society (youtube.com and their wiki page offer platforms for sharing), the war diary or fictional biography of the hero of a past war, a military history, a socio-economic graph of the population, artwork complete with critique that offers insight into the culture or ideology of the society, etc. The possibilities are endless; however, students should approve ideas the instructor before investing too much time or posting online.  
 Objectives:

The open-ended nature of this project is designed to promote discussion within and between groups, to allow the incorporation of a wide array of discourses, and to empower student imagination and autonomy. The project tie-in with the other projects should be highlighted, and students should be made aware of the networks of influence that develop between the three projects. Two questions should be addressed: How did other people (classmates, instructors from other courses, a stranger on the street) effect the development of our compositions? How do networks of knowledge and our access to them effect the ordering of our identity and the development of our compositions?

**Digital Media**

Tom Romano in *Blending Genre, Altering Style: Writing Multigenre Papers* writes that when “instruction is directed solely to the test” (42) students are led to believe that writing is “limited to discrete modes of expression” (42). In expressing this view, Romano emphasizes the broad spectrum of genres—those of a literary nature as well as those arising from information exchange and data storage—in which writing is essential. The proliferation of technology gives access to new genres in new regions. Blogs, social-networking pages, e-mail, chat rooms, video-clips, sound-bites, MP3 playlists, webisodes: as the “acceleration of the process of becoming worn out” (Benjamin 56) continues new forms of human expression through the technological body—the electric medium—will continue to become available.

It may be simple to ascribe the meeting of technology and commodity for this increased generation of generic forms, but the issue is not so one-dimensional. Economic sources are certainly an influential force in this creative process. The capitalist prerequisite for existence—the reproducibility of profit—drives the creation of new commodity genres. Facebook trumps Myspace as the latter becomes susceptible to the capitalist driven “process of becoming worn out” (Benjamin 56). Twitter arises as the next evolution in social networking, driving sales of smart phones on which all of these genres become available in the palm of your hand. Applications on these portable devices allow for not only the consumption of any number of genres across various mediums—visual, oral, literary—but also the creation of texts and new genres—digital video recording in this manner has created a new genre that obliterates both time and space, the on-location amateur new recording. In such a genre the whole of human existence perceivable to any facet of the masses becomes the stuff of a new narrative form in which this mass finds expression through a new technological sensory organ.

Richard Beach in his book *Teaching Writing Using Blogs, Wikis, and other Digital Tools* ascribes to a unique teaching philosophy that integrates technology and print to enforce his emphasis on the blending of these mediums in an organic fashion. Beach asserts that writing instructors should seek to utilize the interpenetration of visuality and composition through digital tools which “drive their [student] learning” (12). Digital tools “foster collaborative writing” and “interconnectedness, for [when using digital media] one is in continual social contact with others, and they blur distinctions between work and play, public and private, accessing and creating information, and learning and entertainment” (Beach 12). While the interdisciplinary nature of Beach’s statements are apparent, he soon makes them explicit, emphasizing the importance of interdisciplinarity to digital forms: “Digital writing tools fosters writing to learn in ways that encourages higher order, cross-disciplinary thinking” (12).

The task facing composition instructors in keeping pace with digital media is complex and ultimately provides limitless options that can be captured for the use of the classroom. These digital media are constantly in use in what Beach refers to as “third spaces” (14)—spaces outside of the home, work, or school in which “students begin to adopt alternative or hybrid language styles that deviate from academic prose” (14).

Navigating the ocean of imagery on the internet, editilng video footage, and uploading and sharing these visual forms through digital tools are all valuable forms of new digital media literacy. Beach establishes parallels between written and visual literacies within the digital plane, incorporating theories of photography and film in his pedagogical philosophy, explaining how such theories can serve to increase critical thinking in students when explored through web media tools. As they write for “third audiences” that “transcend the forces of schooliness” (Burell 1) students find that they are writing “because they want to write [and] [i]n doing so, they are developing a sense of themselves as writers who perceive writing as a means of sharing experiences or influencing others’ actions” (Beach 16) thus embodying many of the elements I have pursued in this study: engagement, identity, and dialogism.

Digital writing is a key component to composition within the digital medium. Beach outlines what he calls “critical composing process[es]” including: “editing and formatting text” to be “readable” and to “engage audiences through visual rhetoric” (19). While it is true that students will engage with digital media on a regular basis outside of the classroom “they may not be skilled at the effective use of visual information to create arguments or design multimodal texts.” (Beach 163). The enhancement of these skills is a primary goal of digital media in the composition classroom.

A proponent of the study of hypertexts, Hocks explores digital spaces where mediums come into contact and the potential for break boundaries abound. Hocks’ rhetorical choice to ride the fence of these break boundaries allows her to express a dialogic viewpoint through the material examples of hypertexts.

Hocks acknowledges that students live immersed in a growing media culture. However, she does not fully explore the changes in systems of expression and communication that precipitate this swelling of cultural signification Modes of meaning-making have proliferated and the conversion of the modes of production to a digital medium has both accelerated the creation process and allowed for the abolishment of time and space in expressing meaning through reproduction and distribution.

From the constructed nature of texts and culture to the constructed nature of identity, Hocks ascribes to a philosophy of interconnectedness, expressing this idea through view on the forming of new forms of literacy as a result of dialogic relations between existing media brought together in digital environments. She explains that it is important for composition instructors to recognize the “hybrid literacies our students now bring to our classrooms” as well as to better understand the increasingly visual and interactive rhetorical features of digital documents” (Hocks 631). She follows through on these dialogic assertions, calling for a heightened self-awareness of the constructed and constructing natures of being. Her commentary on the blending of rhetorical modes in digital composition sheds light on how visual elements and verbal elements fuel design and meaning.

Hocks connects theory to application throughout her text. Typically, her articulation of these interactions is expressed concisely. As she describes experiments in multi-modal digital composition, Hocks provides images that serve as detailed illustrations of the hypertext descriptions. Here she seems intent on practicing the multi-modal model that she preaches; these images bridge the gap between textual description and digital application, providing what Hocks would describe as self-evident argumentation through visuals; however, her use of images does not embody the fusion of visual and verbal that she describes in the hypertext.

In order to further clarify the various aspects of what Hocks refers to as new and hybrid literacies, she outlines three specifics in detail: audience stance, transparency, and hybridity. She explores how both of her example hypertexts handle these elements differently due to choices in design; this is essentially the heartstring of her efforts, to reveal the constructed nature of culture, artifacts, and individuals. She argues that instilling students with the ability to critically analyze design will foster an awareness of the ways in which culture manipulates, creating a pleasurable experience of autonomy. Hocks conclusion rings of Derrida’s deconstructionist point of view, in which he describes the process of separating oneself from the whole in order to observe the structure, though, certainly, the idea of gaining pleasure through this action is not addressed by Derrida in *Writing and Difference*. To Derrida’s perspective, Hocks adds a point of view that infuses pleasure into the experience of this process: an element that cannot be ignored in the context of tension between work and play that has and will always exist in art and literature. She explains that each instance of hypertext represents an engaging rhetorical interaction:

“Each example uses these visual and interactive strategies in ways that are appropriate to the rhetorical situation and the hypertextual medium, but they go beyond formal innovation to help audiences take more conscious responsibility for making meaning out of text. Audiences can experience the pleasures of agency and awareness of themselves as constructed identities in a heterogeneous medium.” (633)

**Conclusion**

*“To use social media as a utility rather than as entertainment”*

-The original intention of Facebook, according to Creator Mark Zuckerburg-

During the advent of Facebook, Zuckerburg’s unique perspective on the possibilities of social media revolutionized not only social media platforms but the perspective of society on these new media. The progressive Zuckerburg recognized a void left by the existing status-quo, composed of entertainment-based social media sites like Myspace and Friendster. These sites offered many new media tools for users to navigate the social plane of the web, but their uses were limited as were their range and depth. Zuckerburg expanded on the entertainment capabilities of his site and aggressively expanded the sites avenues of influence.

Facebook now incorporates private and institutional users from every discipline, occupation, and nation. Business booms on Facebook with a new segment of the economy opening up on its digital pages: advertising, business to business networking, business to consumer relations, non-profit fundraising. Zuckerburg’s vision of the “utitlity” of social media has revolutionized the dialogic sphere in which forms and meaning are constructed.

Zuckerburg addressed a void of neglect between an unrealized cultural demand for social media utility and the technology available to produce this utility. The result was Facebook, an expansive social media platform that awakened the very demand for its own impressive services. In a similar fashion, I aim to awaken composition pedagogists and instructors to the pressing demand for visual and new media literacy instruction. This pressure swells within the bowels of the Academy like an infection treated with band-aids alone. Eventually this pressure will breach the immunities of pedagogical resistance—the process has already begun with composition classes. Courses dedicated to visual culture and new media have been present in the Academy for some time, but certain limitations prevent these new literacy courses developing their full potential. These limiting factors prevent the buildup of necessary momentum to address the literacy issues of the current blending together of visuality, new media, and writing in the current era of the proliferation of new literacies.

New literacy courses in composition are typically elective. This “elective” designation fails to emphasize the importance of critical literacy and composition in visual and new media realms. A majority of 4-year college students are required to take at least one—if not two—writing courses. The justification for the requirement of writing across degree disciplines is how this composition process and its media forms and its various expressions have—for a long time—been inextricably interwoven with the every-day machinations of our culture. Certainly this justification should apply to the composition of visuality and new media: two modes of meaning-making, now sewn into the fabric of our culture and our beings.

Students in remedial composition courses often find themselves absorbed in curriculum aimed at increasing their proficiency in the traditional composition genres with which they have struggled throughout their secondary education. For most of these students, completing their required composition credits is an unpleasant prospective, certainly not prompting them to pursue their education in composition through a visual or media composition elective. Introducing these remedial composition students to alternate modes of composition early on can help increase their ownership and engagement with their composition class; perhaps introducing students to novel forms not tied to the baggage of an anxiety-riddled experience in secondary composition classes. For these reasons new literacy courses rarely appear on the course schedule of students in the greatest need of instruction. The prerequisites often required by these English studies courses in visual culture further limit the cross-section of the student body to which the classes are available in any practical sense.

I hope it has become clear that I do not seek a revolution in academic power, departmental boundaries, or tried and true teaching methods. What I seek instead is a revolution in scope, in proliferation, and in interpenetration of new literacy forms across composition curriculum. I believe that a practical, contemporary perspective on composition dictates these changes.

Old genres—both their essential memory and the learning models they promote—need not be overthrown for the proliferation of new literacy; rather, as dialogism demonstrates, this proliferation will breathe new creative life into entrenched genres. Instructors can adapt evaluative forms and instructional methods to incorporate the new forms offered for study by visuality and new media. Parallels in composition process and structural design should allow for composition in new forms to be incorporated into existing writing units. In this case, time is a concern as class time would have to be dedicated the new forms leaving less time for traditional forms.

The issue of the division of time has arisen in composition studies before. Richard Braddock, Richard Lloyd-Jones, and Lowell Schoer included, in a conclusion on the status of grammar instruction in the composition classroom, these final thoughts: “the teaching of formal grammar has a negligible or, because it usually displaces some instruction and practice in composition, even a harmful effect on improvement in writing” (qtd. Hartwell 205). Stated in “strong and unqualified terms” (Braddock qtd. Hartwell 205) this statement must be interpreted as an inclusion of new literacy composition under the umbrella of composition studies, rather than an indictment of its consumption of class time. Unlike grammar, composing in visual and new media does not *displace* instruction and practice in composition; rather, these actions expand the scope of composition practice in the classroom.

Although philosophically justified as a part of composition curriculum, practically speaking, the curriculum has already been populated with genres, lesson plans, and teaching methods—such structures require time to develop and will likewise require time to accommodate new mediums. The time-saving utilities of new media counterbalance these concerns to a degree. Social media sites allow for convenient out-of-class peer revision, coupled with digital video recording these sites offer the potential for remote presentations viewed outside of the classroom. The list of time-saving—and other—utility functions of new literacy forms goes on.

I do not mean to understate the difficulties in adapting the system of composition studies to new literacy; rather, I hope that my argument for the critical importance of new literacy composition instruction puts certain road blocks to this process in perspective.

The composition classroom does not need to be deconstructed—shaken to bits in order to perform an autopsy with an eye toward improvement. The curriculum simply needs to upgrade to digital for a better picture of the high intensity designs of contemporary discourse. Contemporary traditional students (I recognize that non-traditional college students are not well accounted for in my references to students) have already made the transition to highly visualized forms of digitized discourse, some taking the time to self-educate in new literacy and many others simply consuming its forms. Ultimately, all of these young students represent the next stage in the mass-medium of humanity. As each medium is composed of other mediums, education must address all the forms of media that compose the mass-medium of college students, less those portions of the medium remain blank—ripe for manipulation.

The realm of composition pedagogy—like Mark Zuckerburg—must recognize the utility and demand of new literacy with swift and sweeping action.

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